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# THE HOLY ESTATE


VOL. III.



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# THE



# HOLY ESTATE

A Study in Morals

By

W H WILKINS

(W H de WINTON)

Author of "St Michael's Eve,"  
"The Forbidden Sacrifice," also  
part author of "The Green Bay Tree."

and

FRANK THATCHER.

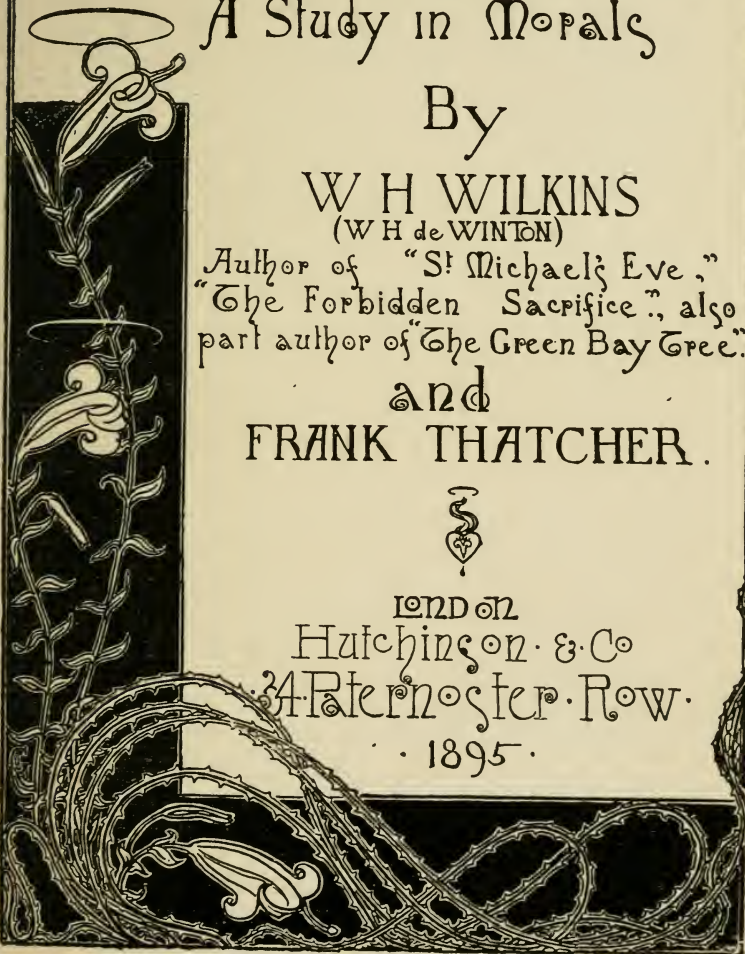


LONDON

Hutchinson & Co

24 Paternoster Row.

1895.







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## AUTHORS' NOTE



*CHAPTERS II.-VI., VIII., XI.-XVI., and XVIII. are  
written by Captain THATCHER.*

*The rest of the Novel is written by Mr. W. H. WILKINS.*

# THE HOLY ESTATE.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

IT was spring in London, the first glimmer of spring, despite the gloom of a day in early March and the east wind which still bore winter on its breath. They were selling flowers in the streets, great bundles of wallflowers, and bunches of hyacinths and daffodils; the crocuses in the park were thrusting their cups, gold and purple and pearly white, above the turf; the blackened twigs of the almond trees in Kensington Gardens were bursting into bud; the whisper of spring was beginning to be heard in the land.

In the drawing-room of a house in Eaton Square, four women were gathered around the fire in the slowly-fading light. It was a large handsome room, furnished with an Oriental wealth of colour,

and a profusion of Persian hangings, embroideries, *phulkaries*, prayer-mats, *phynongee* vestments, and Indian curios, which could only have been gathered together during a prolonged sojourn in the gorgeous East. Despite the lavish colouring, there was no glare nor break in the harmony of deep reds and gold, and blues and browns which glowed within in grateful contrast to the grey light outside.

All the warmth and colour of the room seemed to gather around the beautiful woman who was sitting on the sofa near the fire. The firelight played upon the silver tea-tray over which she was presiding, and upon her jewelled hands as she slowly moved them to and fro among the cups. She had not long come in from a drive, and the keen air had brought an added glow to her cheeks and a lustre to her eyes.

Her dress, like her surroundings, gave an added point to her rich, dark beauty. She wore a flowing tea-gown of Indian silk, fastened at the throat and waist with curiously wrought old silver clasps. Laline had been a handsome woman before her marriage, she was a beautiful one now. Her nature had absorbed the wealth and luxury with which she was surrounded, until it seemed part

of her being. She was the embodiment of it all.

Her visitors, with one exception, Mrs. Babington Massarene, had dropped in accidentally. Lady Bradford had no "day," that dearly-loved institution of upper middle-class matrons, who are struggling to clamber off the topmost rung of the social middle on to the bottom rung of the social upper. She was at home, or not at home, as the fancy pleased her.

Mrs. Babington Massarene, the exception, was a vivacious Irish widow, of catholic tastes, and the means wherewith to gratify them. Her complexion was of the warm creamy pallor, beloved of novelists, save her lips, which were of deep carmine. Her hair, at least as much of it as could be discerned beneath her Spanish hat, was of a gold which ne'er grew on mortal brow, and her figure was seductive. Her morals, like her make-up, were doubtful. But she was sometimes found out in the last, in the first never. The other two were Mrs. Jack Eveline, looking daintier than ever in velvet and furs, and Lady Scrawley, one of those women of whose appearance the mind takes no impressions.

"And you will be in town until Easter, Lady Scrawley?" Laline was asking, nonchalantly handing her a cup of tea. "Cream?"

The other two ladies were inwardly noting each other's points, and outwardly discussing the dresses of the last Drawing-room.

"And sugar," said Lady Scrawley. "Yes, we shall be here until the Easter recess. My husband has his parliamentary duties, you know—and I could not leave him. It's a great bore," she continued, with a grand air. "Positively parliament is hard labour. It's really not worth while. All sorts of horrid creatures get into the House nowadays; the social advantages are none."

"I'm surprised to hear you say so," said Lady Bradford, with a little smile.

Sir Thomas, she knew, had obtained his baronetcy for "services to the party"; that is to say, he had subscribed freely to the party exchequer, kept his mouth shut, and voted like a sheep.

"Oh, well! of course, one has to make sacrifices for the sake of one's country," said Lady Scrawley loftily. She resented that smile. "What would happen to the empire if the classes held aloof?"

"What, indeed!" echoed Laline. "And yet,



do you know, I hardly think that parliament takes much interest in the empire. Lord Lochsporrان took me down to the House last week, on an Indian night. He got me an order for the Ladies' Gallery through Sir Curtsajee, Damnthebhoy, the Parsee member for Billingsgate, don't you know? The place was nearly empty; some fifty old men were half-asleep on the benches, half a dozen bores were letting off long-winded essays at the Under-Secretary, a youth whose knowledge of India had been picked up in an autumn tour. The Secretary of State and Lord Lochsporrان were blinking down upon them from the Peers' Gallery. The whole thing struck me as a farce. No, the empire may be popular at the music-halls; it certainly isn't in the House of Commons."

"India isn't all our empire, and Anglo-Indians are a little apt to overrate its importance, don't you think?" said Lady Scrawley, settling a primrose abomination she wore as a brooch.

Lady Bradford smiled; her withers were unwrung.

"I daresay," she purred; "self-interest has a good deal to do with our patriotism, I'm afraid. That's why I'm interested in India, I suppose. My husband says" (she frequently quoted her

husband to people of the Scrawley type) "that politics are sadly corrupt. I know nothing about them myself, but I don't suppose we are worse than our neighbours."

"That's so ; politicians take the cake in America," broke in Mrs. Jack Eveline vivaciously. "They're just a gang of wire-pullers and lobbyists, and sell their votes to the highest bidder. If a man wants to keep clean hands in 'Merica, let him keep out of politics, I say."

"Well, votes have been bought in the old country too, I believe," said Laline suavely ; "sometimes by gold, more often by a title or a peerage. Of course, we don't call it buying—"

"I should call it eating dirt," exclaimed Mimi, unconscious of Lady Scrawley's glare, "let others call it what they please ; I hope the dirt disagrees with 'em, that's all."

"You see it is so nicely gilded that one hardly knows that it is dirt," said Laline explanatorily, as she handed Lady Scrawley some bread and butter. "It is astounding what a lot some people can swallow if it's only gilded enough. We live in such an age of gilding that we have almost forgotten what the pure metal is like."

"The whole system is just rotten," said Mimi, putting down her tea-cup and mounting her hobby; "the outcome of depraved conditions, bad breeding and bad environment."

Mrs. Babington Massarene laughed, Laline smiled, Lady Scrawley frowned.

"I certainly think there are too many people in the world, if that's what you mean," she said stonily.

"I didn't mean anything of the kind," said the outspoken young matron, and she rose to go. "What we suffer from is not over-population, but bad population. There's the social question in a nutshell. Well, good-bye, Lady Bradford; good-bye, Mrs. Massarene; we shall see you on the 26th, I hope."

"Who is that?" asked Lady Scrawley, as Mimi left the room, looking after her with cold disapproval.

"Is it possible you do not know?" said Laline as she moved back from the bell. "That is Mrs. Jack Eveline; the Evelines are odiously rich Americans, don't you know?"

"Oh! new rich, I suppose," said Lady Scrawley, with all the scorn of Long Acre.

"I like the new rich," interposed Mrs. Massarene.

"At least, most of them. They have quite as many good qualities as the 'old poor,' and their dinners are a good deal better. The new rich struggle for a position by means of their money, the old poor struggle for money by means of their position. It would be difficult to say which drives the harder bargain. If it weren't for the new rich there would be nobody left to entertain in London."

"Well, the Evelines certainly do their duty in that respect," said Laline, with a laugh. "They have bought Lord Wallingford's house in Carlton Gardens, and entertain immensely."

"And do the thing well too," said Mrs. Massarene. "Do you remember their ball last season, Laline; ropes of orchids, rivers of Heidsieck, and whips of hot quail until four o'clock in the morning?"

"No; we didn't know them then. We met them last August at Homburg. Her husband ran the coach. The Prince took her up; it was just before the American craze was on the wane; she was quite the rage there. I thought her rather amusing at first, she has such extraordinary views about marriage, and all that, don't you know? But she bored me after a time. In spite of her odd theories, in practice she's as rigidly respectable as a middle-

aged matron with a monstrous family. If there is one thing more tiresome than another it is to see virtue masquerading as vice."

"It isn't virtue if it does such a thing," said Lady Scrawley severely. "At least not as I understand it."

"The reservation is important," said Lady Bradford

"Everything is two-faced, even virtue," said Mrs. Massarene sententiously. "Mrs. Eveline has, at least, one virtue, for which all her sins may be forgiven her—an admirable cook. But I agree with you, Laline, she bores one. That bow-wow manner of hers is too footling for words."

"Eveline?" said Lady Scrawley meditatively. "I have met a Mrs. Eveline somewhere, I can't think where. Ah! I remember. Dear me, they must be the new people who have taken Burwood. Is her husband an Englishman?"

"I really hardly remember. He left no impression on me, and all the rich young Americans now imitate Englishmen so closely one can hardly tell them apart, especially when they're sent over here to be civilised—educated, I mean. Oh, yes, I should think he might be; he is very young and harmless."

"And strong," interpolated Mrs. Massarene, laughing, "strong and healthy. That was why she married him, Laline. Don't you remember her telling us about it. Oh! it was too funny."

"Then they must be the people who have taken Burwood," said Lady Scrawley with animation. "And she gives quite smart parties, you say? How very nice it will be for the dear girls. And as to her views—well, she's American, of course, and they have such odd views. I must positively call at Easter; they will be down at Burwood then, I expect. Sir Kenneth Goring has already left."

"Ah, Sir Kenneth Goring," repeated Laline slowly, leaning forward to shut down the lid on the spirit-flame. "Have you seen anything of him lately?"

"No; Burwood has been shut up since his mother's death, nearly a year ago. Now he has let the place to these Evelines on a long lease. He has taken a dislike to it, I'm told, since that unfortunate affair of the jewel robbery and all the rest of it."

"Rather a fortunate affair for him, was it not?" said Laline drily. She had picked up a hand-



screen of peacock's feathers, and was holding it between the fire-light and her face. "What were the particulars? I have never heard them."

Lady Scrawley launched forth into a rambling and highly-embroidered story of Sir Kenneth's engagement to Madeleine, of Dampier's sudden appearance, of the attempted jewel robbery, and of Dampier's equally sudden disappearance. Her facts were garbled, but in the main correct. She had picked up a good deal from the Jordans and the servants, and her imagination supplied the rest.

"They tried to hush up the whole thing," she said, "but the truth will come out, and it so happened that Sir Kenneth had sent for the police before he knew that the man was Mrs. Dampier's husband. Then he did everything to stop inquiries. I suppose he succeeded to a certain extent, for the man got clean off, and the French maid with him. Nothing has been heard of them since. A terrible scandal for the Dampier family, the Blankshire Dampiers, you know. He was suspected of having been mixed up with other jewel robberies too. Everybody thought he had been drowned. Something shady happened when he was in India, I have been told. Did you ever hear about it, Lady

Bradford ? You knew the Dampiers out there, did you not ? ” she asked inquisitively.

“ I scarcely knew them. I have met them at Elysium, I think it was,” said Laline with somewhat over-elaborated carelessness. During the whole of this recital she had been leaning back behind her screen. “ One meets all sorts of queer people at Elysium, don’t you know ? There was something discreditable, I remember, now you mention it ; my husband would probably remember the details ; I do not. What has become of the man’s wife ? ”

“ She went away from Burwood immediately after the discovery—disappeared also. Most providential for Sir Kenneth, was it not ? I hear it was positively settled that they were to have been married before Christmas. I am told there was a terrible scene before she left. Poor Mrs. Abington never got over it. They say that Sir Kenneth was inconsolable at the time ; he protested against their separation, offered to go with her anywhere, tried to follow her.”

“ I wonder they didn’t stick to one another, husband or no husband, if he really was as keen as that,” said Mrs. Massarene. “ What an odd

story; it sounds like Drury Lane melodrama."

"He has probably forgotten all about her," said Laline scornfully. "If it is the woman I remember, she is hardly the one to inspire a great passion. . . . Must you be going, Lady Scrawley? Good-bye—so glad I happened to be at home. Good-bye."

"Whatever induced you to be at home to that dreadful woman, Laline?" asked Mrs. Massarene later. She had pulled up a pouf close to the fire, and had settled down for a cosy chat.

The footman had brought in the lamps, closed the curtains, poked the fire, taken away the tea-things, and departed in the interlude, during which they had talked of the cold wind.

"Yes, isn't she awful?" assented Laline. "I will not be at home to her again. I never was before. I shouldn't have let her in now, only, I wanted to learn something."

"About Sir Kenneth Goring," said Mrs. Massarene with a keen glance. "You knew him in India, did you not?"

Laline looked at her steadily for a moment.

Then she put her hands behind her dark head, and leaned back among the cushions. The laces about her wide sleeves fell back ; her bracelets slid down her white arms with a little clink.

"So you have heard that story," she said slowly in her deep musical voice, looking upwards, her face scarcely visible in the shaded lamplight. "Yes, I knew him in India, and—I loved him, as I had never loved any man before, as I shall never love any man again. I shall go on loving him till I die."

Mrs. Massarene's eyebrows went up almost to the fringe of her golden hair. She swerved round on the pouf.

"My dear Laline," she exclaimed shrilly, "why on earth then—"

The other interrupted her with a quick gesture.

"Don't ask me any questions," she said, with suppressed intensity. "Let the past alone. The devil tempted me, and I—married the devil. I have told you the truth to prevent your inventing any more untruths."

Mrs. Massarene looked at the fire reflectively. She didn't feel the least resentful at this impu-

tation on her veracity. She knew Laline's moods.

"Ah!" she said presently. "Now I understand what it is that has kept you straight; there is nothing like a grand passion for keeping a woman straight; it is better than all the ten commandments, or even the fear of being found out. I never experienced a grand passion myself; but I can imagine what it would be like. I thought I did once; but such a lot came crowding after, that it could only have been a little one after all. I really felt quite moral while it lasted."

"Moral!" exclaimed Laline, in the same intense tone. "Don't you think we had better leave morality out of the question? The only true morality is in following the instincts of one's nature. I violated everyone of them when I married, yet people thought that moral enough, forgetting that morality is not always a matter of marriage. What was my marriage, aye, and what was yours, too, but the consecration of some of the baser passions of our natures?"

"Well, mine's over, thank goodness," said Mrs. Massarene with composure. "I'm quite free now to follow my natural instincts, and, as I do follow them to the best of my ability, I ought to be,

according to your showing, the most moral of women. I'm certainly one of the freest."

"That is true," said Lady Bradford more lightly, resting her chin on her hand. "A widow with a good income is one of the most enviable beings on the face of the earth. She has no responsibilities, and no one to say her nay. Talk of freedom! Why, the most emancipated spinster of the Pioneer Club is a bonds slave beside her."

"That is true enough; there is no happiness without freedom. All my penance is in my past; all my pleasure is in the present," said Mrs. Massarene lazily, "the pleasure of doing as I please. I'm not going to run my neck into the matrimonial noose again, if I know it. Let me nibble at my apple now; by-and-by I sha'n't have any teeth left to nibble with. But come don't look so down in the mouth, Laline. It's rough on you, of course, and I'm awfully sorry for you, and all that sort of thing; but it might be worse. After all, you know, things may work round again; you are both young; Goring's free, and you're practically free. In a little while—who knows?"

"Twenty years, or more," muttered Laline



bitterly, looking into the fire. "He is only sixty-five; the doctors say he may live until ninety. There's nothing organically wrong; paralysis sometimes lengthens life. Ugh! think of it, Moya,—twenty years tied to a living corpse! I see myself growing old and grey, and gaunt as Lady Fitzpoodle, passion ebbing out of my heart, my blood cold, my desires dead, and all the time this thing poisoning my life."

She broke off, shuddering, and huddled her arms around her knees. Her bracelets pressed her flesh; they felt like gyves binding her to the husband she loathed. The luxury of the room seemed to mock her.

Her friend came and sat down beside her on the sofa, and threw her arms around her.

"Come, come, Laline," she said, with more feeling than her shallow nature seemed to be capable of; "don't take such a gloomy view of it. Marriage isn't eternal, you know—or indissoluble. If you love the man and he loves you—"

"But he does not. Did you not hear he was going to have married that woman?" broke in Laline. "His love is dead. I killed it four years ago; and even if it were not dead, he doesn't see things as we see them; he is adamant."

"Tut, tut," laughed Mrs. Massarene airily, dropping back to her normal manner. "I've had more experience than most women, and I've never met with an adamantine man yet. Propinquity will soon warm the ashes of his love. He could hardly hug his resentment against you all these years. If he loved you once he will love you again—if he sees enough of you. He's in town, I'm told. We must see what we can do. Don't mope, Laline; it will only spoil your complexion, and injure your digestion. The beautiful Lady Bradford doesn't need to wear the willow. Why, half the men in London are—"

"Lord Kilkenny," announced the footman, throwing open the door.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

LORD KILKENNY came round the corner of the quaint-carved Moorish screen, faultlessly groomed, alert, smiling. There were a few more white hairs in his moustache; otherwise he had changed little the last four years. There was the same faint suspicion of horsiness about his well-cut trousers, and the same merry twinkle in his eye. He had come Home with his viceroy, and was now living on his half-pay as a major in the 29th Lancers, and the whole of his brilliant social qualities. Old Lady Fitzpoodle used to say that a retired aide-de-camp reminded her of a butterfly gone back to the grub stage. Lord Kilkenny's social position saved him from such a retrogression. He remained the butterfly, and flitted from flower to flower.

"How do, Lady Bradford? How do, Mrs. Massarene?" he said blithely. "I am more fortunate than I hoped in finding you at home," he

continued to Laline, seating himself on the pouf recently vacated by Mrs. Massarene.

"More fortunate than you deserve," she answered archly. "I make it a rule never to let in men when I have women, or women when I have men, or either when they bore me, but to-day I have broken my rule in every respect. I don't mean present company, of course; Moya doesn't count, and you never bore me."

Lord Kilkenny's eyes twinkled more than ever.

"It's worth all the coming to hear you say that," he said in a caressing voice.

Mrs. Massarene's glance went from her hostess to Lord Kilkenny, and then back again.

"The only pleasure of making rules is the breaking them," she said. "There is only one rule worth making, and that is to please oneself as the mood takes one. There is a ponderous platitude to the effect that we should govern our emotions or they will govern us. But our emotions are nature's suggestions, and if we do not yield to them we do violence to ourselves."

Laline laughed.

"It is impossible to dogmatise, people are so

different; even oneself is different from day to day."

"Or from morning to evening," chuckled Lord Kilkenny. "In the morning we make resolutions, and in the evening we break 'em."

"One must follow one's moods," insisted Mrs. Massarene; "if one doesn't yield to an emotion at the time, there's no good in yielding at all. It will all be flat, stale, and unprofitable; like eating one's dinner when one has ceased to be hungry."

She was getting quite vivacious. The presence of a man always acted like a cordial upon her drooping spirits.

"Well, I hope your mood will fall in with mine," said Lord Kilkenny, still looking at Laline. "I have a box at the Empire to-night, and I want to know if you, Lady Bradford, and if you, Mrs. Massarene, will come. I've asked Jack Davenport too. We'll have a little dinner at Willis's to lead off; and perhaps you'll come back to my chambers after the show and have a spin at roulette to wind up with—the night'll be yet young, you know."

"Oh, that will be too trotty!" exclaimed Mrs.

Massarene, clapping her hands. "Of all things, I love a frisk on the spur of the moment. A pre-meditated pleasure generally ends in an unpre-meditated bore."

"I'll come," said Laline slowly, "only not to the Empire. I'm tired of music-halls. I've gone to them hoping to be shocked, and have only been bored instead. Try for the Gaiety or somewhere, and tell us where we are to go when we meet you at dinner."

"And get another man," exclaimed Mrs. Massarene; "get him from somewhere—only get him. There should always be at least one man more than the women. I hate the idea of people always going about in pairs like the creatures in Noah's ark!"

Lord Kilkenny promised to do his utmost in both respects.

"I was more than half afraid you'd both have some engagement," he said, still looking at Laline. She was leaning back among her bright-hued cushions, slowly waving her peacock screen. The lamplight glinted her dress and the coils of her hair.

"Oh," she said, "one hasn't so many engagements

in Lent, especially on Friday. Though, for the matter of that, I throw over engagements without scruple if anything better turns up. I'm like Moya in that respect. But to-night I positively thought of taking my maid and going to church, by way of killing the time. There's rather a sensational preacher just now at St. Peter's."

"Is it Lent?" asked Lord Kilkenny vaguely. "I had forgotten it."

"You never knew it, you mean," said Mrs. Masarene, shaking her finger at him. "It's just begun; though, to tell you the truth, I had forgotten it too. I never go to church, except sometimes on Sunday morning in the country, and to weddings, of course. I take a melancholy interest in weddings; they are always either tragedies or farces. They move one sometimes to tears, and often to laughter. I think if I ever went in for religion seriously I should become a Roman, and worship at Farm Street. Romanism in England always reminds me of some gorgeous exotic in a cold climate. I love exotics, and I hate the cold. But I sha'n't take up Romanism unless it becomes necessary to rehabilitate my reputation, like those queer actress creatures one reads about. I'm lack-

ing in veneration. Laline is different; she has a curious devotional vein running through her, which can only be satisfied by chants and church-going. Now, church-going is a cheap amusement, and I hate cheap amusements. That is why it is the favourite pastime of the middle classes; because it is so cheap."

"You are profane, Moya," rebuked Laline. "I hate cheap amusements too. But I hardly think I should include a Friday evening service at St. Peter's under the heading of amusements."

"Well, it must be a penance, then," said Mrs. Massarene. "The way some people play off Lent as an excuse always amuses me. They give up parties which bore them, and dinners which don't agree with them, and strike an easy bargain with their sins of the rest of the year."

"I'm not sure it's a bad idea," said Lord Kilkenny, "if you look at it in that light. One stops sinning for a minute in order that one may sin for an hour. Is that it?"

Mrs. Massarene laughed. "If you like to put it so," she said. "But that is not my way at all. My idea is to take a sip from the cup of pleasure when one wishes, and not to run away from



it. Let us be happy while we may. Why bore ourselves in the present for the sake of a future which may never be? Boredom is my *bête-noir*; there are only three prescriptions for it."

"And those?"

"Sin, sleep, and champagne—a combination of all three for preference."

Lord Kilkenny laughed until he nearly rolled off the pouf. Laline looked barely amused.

"I can't sleep," she said languidly, "and I loathe champagne. As for sin, as you call it—sin, like salt, may lose its savour, and then, what is the use of sinning?"

"Fairly capped, by Jove!" said Lord Kilkenny. "Come, Mrs. Massarene, how are you going to meet that?"

"By running away from it," she rejoined, rising, "as we are told we ought to do from sin. Well, ta-ta. I must be off; see you later. Dinner at eight, I think you said."

"That woman reminds me of a nineteenth century edition of Bunyan's *Mrs. Love-the-flesh*, revised by a Bond Street milliner," said Lord Kilkenny, when he had come back from closing the door upon the departed guest.

He was standing on the white bear-skin rug in front of the fire, looking down at Lady Bradford. He seemed uncertain whether to go or stay.

Laline lifted her eyebrows with a gesture of indifference.

"She's my very dear friend; I shall feel offended if you abuse her," she said, in anything but an offended tone. "She has an odd way of putting things, but you mustn't take her in the least literally. People who are really vicious, never parade their vice in that way. And positively sometimes in a wordy waste of dreariness she hits on something witty."

"People who chase wit often catch nonsense," remarked Lord Kilkenny, pulling at the end of his moustache, and looking covertly at the vacant seat on the sofa next to his hostess.

She noticed the look, and made a slight, a very slight, movement with her dress. He took it as an invitation, and sat down beside her. The shaded lamps threw patches of orange-coloured light about the room, but in the corners the shadows lurked. The warm dusk was heavy with the breath of hyacinths.

There was a minute of silence.

‘And yet,’ he said in a lower voice, “there was a good deal in what she said too, about gathering the flowers while we may. A joy postponed is often a joy lost; don’t you think so?”

Laline put her screen before her mouth, and yawned slightly.

“My dear Lord Kilkenny,” she said, “surely you have not stayed behind to talk to me about Mrs. Massarene?”

She knew exactly why he had stayed, and felt a thrill of pleasant excitement at the thought of it. It was like playing with fire, but she had no intention of being singed—at present.

Lord Kilkenny fixed his eyes in bold admiration on her face.

“No, Lady Bradford, that is not the reason,” he said. “I have stayed because I wanted to be alone with you, if only for a few minutes—and it is worth waiting for.”

“That is very nice and sweet of you,” said Laline suavely. “I’m always glad to be amused, only don’t say all your funny things now or we shall have none left for this evening. In this case the joy postponed will not be a joy lost.”

He looked at her silently. She caught the light

in his eyes, and something within her responded to it. It gratified her to think that this handsome man should be at her feet. She had no intention of being at his; but she liked him; her senses were allured by him.

“Do you remember,” he said slowly, “that night when we were staying at Craven a month ago?—do you remember what I said to you there, that it was better to love to-day than to-morrow, for the day is, and the morrow may never be? Do you remember? I haven’t been able to see you alone for a minute since.”

“I remember,” she answered lightly, “I remember all about it. The champagne was excellent, the band was playing dreamily, and we were alone after supper, and—well, it was just as well you went away the next morning.”

Her hand fell down palm upwards on the sofa; he moved a little nearer and covered it with his own. The contact made her pulses quicken; the laces at her bosom rose and fell. She did not take her hand away.

“Laline,” he said below his breath—and then paused.

She looked at him, but did not speak.

Her face was in shadow ; her eyes glowed.

"Laline," he said again, bending his handsome head nearer, "how long are you going to play fast and loose with me like this? How long is this sort of thing to go on? Don't you know that half a lifetime may be spent in hesitating?"

"Yes," she said, "and the other half in regretting. Pray, Lord Kilkenny, do not call me Laline. I gave you no leave."

"Love does not ask leave," he said boldly, still holding her hand ; "love dares. If one dares one can do all things."

"One can attempt all things," she said, leaning back among her cushions ; "whether one can accomplish all things is another matter. Now, please go away, or I shall be late for dinner—another word, and I shall not come at all."

"Not another word?" he said ; "but—"

Their eyes met. The blood mantled her face. The fragrance of her hair smote his sense, her breath fanned his cheek. He leaned forward with a sudden movement. . . . . A second later she

broke away from him, her lips quivering, her eyes shining, her bosom heaving.

“Go—go!” she panted below her breath.

And Lord Kilkenny went.

When the footman came in some minutes later, he found his mistress drawn up in a low chair before the fire apparently lost in thought. He came quite close before she noticed his presence.

“If it is convenient, Sir John would like to speak to you in the library, my lady,” he said.

She made a slight motion of her head to show the servant that she had heard, and relapsed into thought again. Her emotion was subsiding pleasantly, but the touch of that man’s lips still lingered, her pulses still throbbed at the remembrance. She did not feel indignant at this bold wooing; she liked a masterful lover. Her vanity was gratified, her senses were allured, but her heart was not touched. And as she mused, there came back to her the memory of a clump of giant pines, of the sunlight glinting through and playing about the heads of two who sat on the ledge of the dried-up well, of strong arms around her, of a deep voice telling her of an honest love; of true, brave

eyes looking into hers. Ah! the thought stabbed her! It was very different, that light she had caught in Lord Kilkenny's eyes ten minutes ago. With a sudden spasm of shame, she dragged the heavy silver bracelet round and round her arm where also his lips had pressed, until a red bar showed on the white flesh. Then she let her hands fall into her lap.

"I will not go to-night," she said half aloud. "I will not go—and he will know—that I am not the woman—he would have me to be."

She arose, and glanced at herself in the glass. She settled the laces at her throat, and put her hands up to her hair. Then she went slowly downstairs to the library.

Her husband looked up at her with angry impatience as she entered.

"I sent for you half an hour ago," he snarled, "why didn't you come? What have you been doing with yourself all day?"

He was half reclining, half sitting, on a couch drawn up before the blazing fire, but despite the heat the lower part of his body was covered with a thick fur rug. He was always cold there now. A reading-lamp was on the table close to his side, and



the light from it shone on his face ; he looked old, yellow, and hideous. The top of his body was carefully dressed. Except that the fringe of red hair around his bald head had turned white, and the hand lying outside the rug looked wan and delicate from long confinement, there were no signs to show that half the man was inert and helpless. The doctors were right. Sir John Bradford would take long a-dying.

Some thought of this ran through his wife's mind as she looked at him. She shivered.

"It is exactly ten minutes since I received your message," she said with calm indifference. "I had callers. I could not come before. What is it that you want?"

Sir John told her briefly ; he wished to give a dinner party in honour of a great native prince who was in England just now. They must ask an ex-viceroy and his wife, the Secretary of State, and others. No expense was to be spared. He was able to give these functions in his own house, wheeled into the dining-room in his chair, though he could not attend them elsewhere. His opinion on Indian affairs still carried weight with those in authority, and his wealth had saved him from that eclipse



which seems inevitable to ex-officials, however highly placed they may have been. These things gratified him. He loved to see his handsome house filled with the great of the earth, his beautiful and brilliant wife bejewelled and bedecked like the Queen of Sheba, presiding over his lavish hospitality. The glory of these things reflected back upon himself; his house, his wife, jewels and all—all were his. In them was summed up all that life had left for him.

Laline loved it too; wealth, luxury, display, admiration, social success were part of her being. For these things she had sold herself, and she took toll to the utmost. What matter the misery and loathing which lay behind? To the world which she worshipped, his world, her world, they must needs keep up a brave show. To them the fear of the world was the beginning of wisdom, and the end of it for that matter. She fell in with his mood, listened to what he had to say, suggested names, deprecated others, until the timepiece on the mantel chimed the half-hour.

She looked at it and hesitated. He caught her look.

“Surely you have no engagement to-night?” he

exclaimed irately. "Out every night, and all day as well. What is the meaning of it; at this time of the year too? Where are you going to-night?"

She resented his tone; her colour rose; but she answered indifferently enough.

"I am not sure that I shall go. I hardly feel in the mood," she said. Then she looked at him with a faint shadow of defiance in her eyes. "Lord Kilkenny is giving a little dinner at Willis's, and a box at the play. Moya Massarene will be there, and one or two others."

Sir John brought his hand down on the table.

"I forbid you to go!" he cried. "Do you hear, I forbid you! I will not have you going about with Kilkenny. Things are going too far. People will be talking. He is always here—I will put a stop to it. I will tell the servants not to admit him."

She looked at him with scarcely concealed aversion.

"You will do nothing of the kind," she said. "People will talk a great deal more if you do. I will not have my name the subject of servants' gossip. I will not listen to your coarse threats. That decides me—I shall go to-night."

"You will do as I bid you," he said, with an oath, "or by—"

"I will do what I please, go where I please, see whom I please," she retorted angrily, "without let or hindrance. Do you remember our bargain? we were each to go as we pleased."

"I remember nothing of the sort," he said, with a laugh, which brought the blood to her face. "You were hardly in a position to make a bargain when I bought you—aye, bought you—the very clothes you are wearing are mine. You hadn't a penny to bless yourself with—"

"Of course I hadn't," she said, "or do you think I should have sold myself to you? I loathed you. You bought—I sold. Well, you have had good value—oh, yes, you have." She checked his protest with a gesture. "You bought a wife, not a nurse—nursing was not in the bond. You have had good value; I will see that I get the same."

She rose to go.

"I forbid you to go! I forbid you to meet him, or to receive him!" he stormed. "I will put somebody to watch, and if I catch you tripping, by—I'll have a divorce—I will—I will."

"You will do nothing of the kind," she said

scornfully. "An exposure in the public courts would hardly suit you or me. Why, the world would only laugh and say that you were hoist with your own petard, or mumble the old story of an old man and a young wife. Can't you hear the echoes of its laughter? You are disquieting yourself in vain. There will be no open scandal, no gossip about my good name—you may trust me for that; for my sake, not for yours. More than that you have no right to ask. Because the grapes are sour to you, are my teeth to be set on edge? Divorce forsooth! Do you think I have forgotten the first year of our marriage? Why, I have enough evidence—but what is the use of talking to an angry man? I shall leave you to come to your senses, and I shall not come near you again until you have found them."

He burst into a torrent of threats, abuse, and re-  
crimination. She swept from the room without a  
backward glance, and left him there, foaming with  
impotent rage. He could not stop her, he could  
not follow her, to make a scene would only be to  
make himself ridiculous. Experience told him that  
it was useless. He could only lie like a log on his  
couch and curse her in his heart. The measure

which he had meted to others was being meted to him again.

Half an hour later he heard the rustle of her dress as she came down the stairs, the sound of her voice giving some direction to the servants in the hall, the opening and shutting of doors. Then the wheels rolled away, and he was left—old, helpless, ailing, at the mercy of hirelings—alone!

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE daily evensong at St. Athanasius, Bloomsbury, was just over, and the few worshippers were dispersing. It was a typical week-day congregation—some half a dozen old ladies, three or four middle-aged spinsters, two or three clergymen, and a pimply-faced young man. There was one more, a woman, who still remained in the silent church, a solitary, kneeling figure, her head bowed upon her hands.

She lingered so long that the caretaker, impatient to go home to his tea, shuffled past the pew in his rusty cassock, and jingled his keys. The hint was not lost upon her.

With a little start she arose from her knees and walked down the aisle out of the church into the wind-swept street. There was something very pathetic about her. Her eyes seemed to have grown too large for the small white face ; there was a droop about the corners of the sweet mouth, a stoop of the shoulders which was habitual now.

At first sight one would hardly have known that it was Madeleine Dampier.

And yet Madeleine it was. Some eighteen months had passed since she left Burwood, eighteen months of earnest striving to do right, of loneliness, of joyless toil, of even more joyless rest. What wonder that they had left their mark? Into the warm summer of her life had come a winter's frost. What wonder that it had frozen the flowers, and nipped the buds of love, and joy, and peace, leaving in its wake the blackened twigs and withered leaves of a ruined life? The struggle had been a severe one. So far she had come out of it the victor, but it was at best a Pyrrhic victory. A woman cannot conquer her heart; she does not reason with it; she either breaks it or yields to it. Madeleine's was breaking.

The phrase is commonplace. Yet there are few which express the shade of meaning better. Hearts which break, break in silence. Madeleine's was breaking this way, all the more surely because silently. The great sorrows of life are silent ones; if they be not silent then there is relief. And more, the great sorrows of life are lasting ones; it is the awful conviction that they are lasting which makes

them so great. It has been said that every great passion is a prolonged hope, but with Madeleine, as her hope grew less, her love grew greater. And love is never stationary ; it decreases when it ceases to increase. Hers was ever growing, and the more it grew the more she suffered. Her love for Goring was the love of her life, it had grown into the fibres of her being ; she could not uproot it. The passion of her girlhood which she had felt for a brief space towards her husband was not love, though she had mistaken it for love. But this was the all-absorbing love of a woman who has learnt by sad experience the difference between the gold and the dross.

The solitary life she had elected to live conspired to feed it. It drove her back upon herself, and made her dwell continually on what might have been and what was. Perhaps if there had been no alternative but this life of loneliness, if Goring had died, or if he had ceased to love her, or had married, she would have brought herself, as many have done before, to that dull acquiescence in the inevitable which some call resignation. But none of these things happened. She knew that he continued faithful to her in thought, word, and deed ; she



knew that his life was empty because she would not come into it, and the knowledge was at once her joy and her sorrow. She knew that she had but to make a sign, and her present loneliness and misery would vanish in a moment, that he would come to her, and order his life for her in all things as she would. Herein lay her temptation.

There was nothing of the New Woman (with capital letters) about Madeleine ; she was merely a loving one, and in her love her weakness lay. The Marriage Question (also with capital letters) was no question with her. It no more occurred to her that it could be right to break her marriage vows, because her husband had broken his, than it would be right for her to steal, or slander, or slay, or break any other commandment of the decalogue. The sophistries which many weave around the seventh commandment did not appeal to her at this time. And yet sometimes there would come to her in the dreariness of the day, in the loneliness of the night, a terrible doubt whether, after all, the path she had chosen was the right one. It was hard enough, thorny enough, narrow enough, steep enough in all truth, but was it right ? Every force within her cried out aloud against the re-

straint she had imposed upon herself. Was she violating her higher nature, or conquering her lower one? Ah, no, it could not be the lower one—for she loved him so. Was not this love God-implanted, all-sufficient for her? In its light could she err? by following its command could she sin? The word trembled on her lips—“*Come.*” Then would rush back to her all the force of her early training, of her religious teaching, of the law of God as interpreted by her church, and once again she would thrust the thought from her as a thing unholy, and pray that she might resist temptation, that a strength greater than her strength might bear her up and guide her faltering feet.

And in some degree the strength generally came.

She needed it. Eighteen months is short to write, long to live; how she had lived through them she hardly knew. Her one idea in leaving Burwood was to flee temptation, but in her flight temptation had followed closely; not from without, but from within. Of Goring she had seen nothing; he had loyally obeyed her. He was waiting for the summons which did not come. Only once had he written to her, and that was when his mother

died. But she knew that he was informed of her movements by Mrs. Jack Eveline, who had warmly espoused his cause. She knew that his love had not changed. She knew that there was no compulsion for her to live in poverty. He had desired to give her without conditions the money which he proposed to have settled on her had their marriage taken place. But she had positively refused to touch a penny of it. How could she? She was nothing to him now. She could never be anything to him again. She was not friendless. Her friends had rallied round her; both Mrs. Eveline and Mimi had done all they could. It was Madeleine's fault they could do so little. She refused Mrs. Eveline's offer of a home, and it was only the force of dire necessity which made her accept a money-loan from her. It was so small that it barely enabled her to exist, but she would not take more. She took two little rooms in a dingy Bloomsbury Street, and sought for employment. But it was hard to get. She might have been left seeking, had not Mimi found her some work for a few hours daily, as a governess in Harley Street, in a friend's family, and, unknown to her, augmented her salary. Madeleine was grateful for the work and the salary; it kept her mind partly employed

and it enabled her to pay back a part of Mrs. Eveline's loan.

She would have paid it all back, had not an unforeseen accident occurred.

She was trudging back from Harley Street to her Bloomsbury lodging one evening. It was one of the dark days after Christmas. She had been delayed somewhat later than usual by the holidays, which threw everything out of gear. She was hurrying along in her nervous way, for she had never grown accustomed to the London streets, when, at a corner of Regent Street, as she was waiting a moment to cross, she came full face with Julie, Mrs. Abington's quondam maid. For a moment their eyes met,—in Madeleine's amazement, in the Frenchwoman's a malevolent gleam; then Madeleine hurried across the street, her heart beating with fear.

One night a few days later Dampier appeared at the Bloomsbury lodgings. The Frenchwoman had dogged her steps; her hiding-place was discovered. He came late, his hat slouched over his eyes, his whole bearing showing a fear of detection—a fear which never left him. Goring had done what he could to prevent his pursuit by the police, but he did

not know that. He had been hiding in the wilderness of London, it appeared, for the last year ; his luck had been against him, drink and gambling had brought him lower and lower. He was hard pressed ; he wanted money, and money he would have. Madeleine, taken by surprise, almost beside herself with the terror and aversion which his presence had always inspired in her, gave him nearly all she had—anything to get rid of him.

It is an unwise thing to buy off one's Danes. A few weeks later he came again, again, and yet again, always with the same demand ; each time he grew bolder, more extortionate in his demands, and each time her ability to satisfy them grew less. She was at a loss to know how to escape. If she merely changed her lodgings, he would hunt her down again. She might leave London, but if she did so, her means of subsistence would be gone—and then whither, or to whom, should she fly ? Mrs. Eveline had gone abroad for a prolonged tour with her husband, who was conducting an investigation for the Department of Agriculture, as to the origin of the Colorado beetle, or something of the kind. There was Mimi ; but Madeleine knew exactly what she would say, with her peculiar views on the obli-

gations of the marriage tie. She was wholly on Goring's side, and she would simply use this as another argument in favour of Madeleine abandoning her present attitude. Kenneth—to appeal to him was impossible; it would amount to a confession that circumstances were too strong for her. She might apply to the law for protection, but that would be to deliver her tormentor up to justice. She shrank from that. She could not violate her marriage vows in any respect. And so Dampier worked upon her weakness until, to satisfy his demands, she had to deprive herself of almost the necessities of life. She was alone; she was helpless; sorrow had broken her.

It was an unequal fight, her great love and her great terror on the one side, her sense of right and duty on the other. Her face grew whiter, her slight figure more bowed. Dampier hovered like a vampire over her, drawing her very life blood. The longing to escape from him by any means grew fiercer.

She had turned, as many do turn when all else fails, as it was her nature to turn always, to religion. Herein she had found, if not the fulness of the consolation she sought, at least some measure

of it. But of late that source had been failing too.

January and February passed, March dawned. It was one afternoon in early March that she dropped in, as she frequently did on her way homeward from Harley Street, to the week-day even-song at St. Athanasius. But the words of the service fell on deaf ears ; the monotonous monotone, unrelieved by a single chant, the violet-vested altar (it was Lent), the almost empty church, all struck with a sense of unreality and hopelessness. How could it be otherwise ? That which her soul yearned for was not here. Her love for Goring stood between her and her religion. She felt a vague sense of impending danger. The same voiceless prayer beat upon her brain in the church and as she hurried homeward along the street :—“ *Be not far from me, for trouble is near.*”

Alas ! trouble was near indeed.

It was one of Madeleine's bad days. As she walked homeward her sense of desolation deepened. Her lodgings were in a by-street which turned off one of Bloomsbury's biggest squares. At the corner of the street an old woman begged her to buy some violets. She was withered and hideous, and



shivered in the bleak wind. Madeleine's coppers were few, but with the sympathy borne of suffering, she bought a bunch, and the woman's effusive thanks brought a ray of warmth to her heart.

In the little passage of her lodging her landlady met her, a smile, born of an unexpected tip, beaming over her red, good-natured face.

"There's a gentleman a-waitin' to see you, ma'am. He've been a-waitin' this half hour nor more."

A fear tightened round Madeleine's heart. Her white face grew whiter. Had he taken to come by day also?

"Oh! not 'im," said the landlady contemptuously. She had her own ideas about her lodger's nocturnal visitor. "A tall, 'ansome gentleman, ma'am, as you'd wish to see. Shall I bring tea up now, or wait till he's gone?" she added inquisitively. Mrs. Dampier's visitors were few.

"Oh, please wait," said Madeleine, wearily mounting the stairs to her room. "Who could it be? Was it someone on business? Was it Jack Eveline? Was it—"

She pushed open the door. A man was standing with his back to the window in the fading



light. He came towards her with outstretched hands.

“Madeleine,” said a well-remembered voice,  
“Madeleine.”

With a little cry she fell upon his breast.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

IT seemed so good to her to rest here, in the arms of the man whom she loved, and to sob out her sorrow on his breast. It seemed so natural to him that she should do so, and that he should soothe and protect her in her loneliness and grief.

The twilight deepened in the little room, the shadows wrapped them round. Still he held her to him ; his sympathy was wordless. The force of her emotion spent itself slowly ; her sobs grew less and less, until at last they died away in a tired sigh. And with her calmer mood remembrance came, remembrance of the past which the joy of this unexpected present had for a brief space blotted out, and with it came also a flash of shame that she should have betrayed her weakness. She drew away from him and sat down in a chair. She was trembling from head to foot. The shock of this sudden joy, coming as it did upon days and nights

of anxious misery, uncongenial toil, and insufficient food, had utterly unnerved her.

"I am so tired," she said piteously; the words escaped her involuntarily.

He did not answer at once. But his look travelled around the shabby room—shabby despite its neatness—and came back to the solitary figure beside the fire. A lump rose in his throat. He had not realised until now the hardship of this self-imposed martyrdom.

She read what was in his mind.

"Oh! Kenneth, why have you come?" she asked helplessly.

He knelt down and kissed her hands. His words came brokenly.

"Poor thin hands, poor white face, poor wan Madeleine. I have come because you need me, because I need you—because I love you."

He went on to tell her, still kneeling—as a man may kneel before his God or the woman he worships—how his soul had hungered and thirsted for her all these months, how he had found out where she lived from Mimi Eveline, how he had hovered near her house for the last two weeks, craving for a word or a look, battling with himself, yet loyal to his

promise not to come to her unless at her bidding, until one night, a few nights ago, he had seen Dampier slouch up to the house, enter it, and go away again. Then he knew that she was hunted down, and that her persecution had set in afresh. That decided him.

“And so I have come,” he said, “to ask you to reconsider your decision, to let me forego my word, to give me the right to protect you against him—against all the world. You cannot send me from you again.”

He rose, and stood before her, awaiting her answer. But she made none. The firelight flickered on her black dress and on her hands, which lay in her lap; it caught the thin gold wedding ring, and sparkled there. He saw her eyes rest on it, and a tear rolled down her cheek.

A sudden thought struck him.

“Madeleine, there is no feeling left on your part towards that—that brute—there cannot be?”

She shuddered.

“His presence stifles me; he is killing me. And yet—I would help him if I could! I cannot; he is past help.”

“I cannot see you suffer like this,” he said. “Yet

I am powerless. You made me take the police off his track—and this is the result. What does he want?”

“Money—money! Always money—there is nothing more!”

He leant forward eagerly, his face flushed.

“Let me be your banker.”

She shook her head.

“To what end? It would but encourage him the more.” Then anticipating the protest which was hurrying to his lips. “No—no—I have all I want—my wants are few. It is this man. He is crushing my life.”

“But why suffer it? It is infamous. If you will not have my help—the help of any of your friends—why not appeal to the law?”

She did not answer immediately. Her glance went upward, and fell upon a little picture on the mantelpiece, the solitary ornament. It was the photograph of a child. The gesture was eloquent.

“You forget,” she said, almost in a whisper.

There was a pause.

“I forget nothing,” he said sadly. “I have lost the power to forget. This is not a matter of

sentiment, but of common sense. It is a duty you owe to yourself. The law at least will protect you from this."

"To do so would be to betray him," she said, "and then—those courts— I cannot do it."

He turned away, and bit his lip. He could not follow her reasoning; he was a man. He crossed over to the window, and looked out. The lamps had just been lighted in the street below; they were struggling with growing dusk. The street was dreary and monotonous—as only a street of Bloomsbury lodging-houses can be. In some way it seemed to him the reflex of her life. A sense of desperation stole over him. He turned away sharply, and came back to the fireplace.

"How long is this to go on?" he asked. "It is killing you; it is wrecking my life too. Our lives are knit together; you cannot separate them. The experiment has been tried, and failed. You cannot say it has not had a fair chance; I have not interfered. I have stood by and waited; it has failed. Let us admit the failure. Let us blot out the past, and start anew—in some other land, together always."

His voice shook with the earnestness of his

appeal; his eyes were shining. She put her hands to her face. The glimpse of happiness held out to her, the contrast between her life as it was and as it might be, made her dizzy.

"Together always!" The words escaped her involuntarily. They were the echo of her thoughts.

"Always," he repeated. "Why hesitate? Do you doubt my love for you?"

"Oh, no," she answered quickly; "in love such as ours there is no doubt. Perfect love casts out doubt, even as it casts out fear. It is not your love I doubt, Kenneth, but your happiness. How can I darken your life with the shadow of my disgrace? I, who love you so dearly."

He made an impatient gesture.

"Always that same theme," he said. "Am I not the best judge of my own happiness? Am I a boy, not to know my mind? I have no happiness in life if you do not share it. You know what my life is without you—its emptiness. There is no shadow on your name. What has happened is not your fault. You have urged this before; I have answered it before; that night when we plighted our troth beneath the stars—before anyone came between us. Do not let us go over it

again. I offered you honour then—I offer you what the world would call dishonour now. And yet, God helping me, there shall be no dishonour. My life, my life's love, my life's worship, what more can man give to woman? In these there is no dishonour."

She turned away from him, her head drooping, her hands clasped. The temptation was sore upon her. Why should she beat against fate's door for ever? Once again, as during that last interview with him in the library at Burwood, a sense of impotence stole over her. It was some minutes before she spoke again.

"It is not only what has been," she said, "it is what will be, if I yield. It is not what the world will say of me—the world is nothing to me—nothing! I know if it were possible for me to divorce this man—and it may be possible—and marry you, the world would applaud; if I came to you without the divorce the world would condemn. And yet the sin, if sin there be, or the right, if right there be, would be the same in either case"

He could not see her face, the shadows had closed in so quickly. The firelight danced in weird



patches along the walls and across the ceiling. The rest of the room was in shadow.

"Dear one," he said, "that only is sin which hurts another, and this would harm no one. You hesitated at Burwood because of my mother; that reason exists no more. No one living has any claim on you or on me; no one wants you but I. There is no wrong."

She turned to him, trembling.

"Wrong!" she said; "right! How glibly the words flow from our lips! How little we know their meaning! Kenneth, when I left you at Burwood, I told you that the thing which you would have me do was wrong. To-day, after months of prayer and fasting and tribulation, I tell you that I do not know whether it be wrong or right. I only know this, that I pray for light and grope in darkness; the more I pray for light the greater is the darkness—God, help me."

She lifted her tear-stained face to his. He took her in his arms again. He thought that she had yielded, but he underrated the strength of her resistance. She drew herself away with a little shuddering sigh.

"But there is the doubt; it is the doubt which makes me pause," she said.

He looked at her, startled by this change of mood.

"Madeleine," he remonstrated, "you cannot halt between two opinions for ever—the best years of our life are passing. Hope, joy, youth are ebbing. I entreat you. You shall never regret it, I swear to you, as long as life lasts."

She caught her breath.

"So long as life lasts," she said. "But there is another life; it is as real to me as my love for you. If this be a sin in God's sight, then may it not be that my love, by which I would raise you, will become the means of your ruin? You say it will hurt no one. But what if those we love—your mother, my father, my child—be waiting for us beyond the grave, and this sin should drive us for ever from their sight? Oh, Kenneth, do you not see we cannot judge only as the world judges? We must look above, and beyond—beyond where the fashion of the world fades into darkness, and before us is the unknown ocean and the cloudy night. Until I have satisfied myself, how can I do this thing and run the risk of sinning

against God, against you, and against myself?"

A sense of helplessness stole over him. What could he do with a woman who thought like this? He looked at her thoughtfully. Her eyes were rapt, but her face was worn. The spirit was undaunted, but the body was weak. A dread crept over him, and beat back the words that crowded to his lips.

"Am I to stand by and watch you dying, then—" he said, "alone?"

"I have borne it for eighteen months," she answered. "None will ever persuade me that I have borne it alone."

"Eighteen months," he said. "Yes. And what have they been to you and to me? And yet another eighteen months—what then? And another? My God! I cannot bear to see you suffer so. I cannot!"

He bowed his head upon the mantelpiece with a groan. She came beside him, and put her arm around his neck.

"Dear heart," she whispered, "be brave. It is darkness here, but somewhere there is light. Who knows? If we wait, some ray may reach us."

He looked up.

"I will wait," he said; "it is you who suffer most. I will wait for years if need be. Only say you trust me—I cannot trust myself."

She put her hand in his with a wan little smile.

"I trust you, Kenneth," she said; "I trust you. See how brave I am. Be brave too. And now good-bye. Do not come again until you hear from me. Good-bye."

She kept that same pathetic smile on her face until he left the room, until she heard his steps go down the creaking stairs, and the slamming of the hall door told her that he was gone.

Then she threw herself on her knees with an exceeding bitter cry.

"O God, give him to me! I love him—I love him! If such love be sin, what is righteousness?"

## CHAPTER XL.

A FEW days later, by a freak of chance, or of fate, Goring met Lady Bradford again.

He had been trying all day to stifle down the sense of dissatisfaction with the world and all things, which now was nearly always at his heart. Since he had seen Madeleine it had redoubled. He was nothing of a philosopher, and if he had been—what of it? It has been well said that philosophy triumphs over evils past and evils to come, but present evils triumph over philosophy. They certainly did over his philosophy. Life seemed to him dull, grey, hopeless. He had many of those whom the world calls friends, but he realised that one is alone when one suffers. He had called that afternoon upon Mrs. Jack Eveline. He wanted to talk to her, with the characteristic selfishness of friendship, all about his troubles. He knew that she was on his side. But she was not at home, and he was driven back upon his own resources.

He strolled aimlessly up Waterloo Place and Regent Street, wondering how he should kill the time. The mood took him to drop into the New Gallery and have a look at the pictures. It was one of the winter exhibitions, a collection of the works of a great Master. These were the closing days.

Coming from the fog and noise of the street, the sense of warmth and stillness inside was pleasant.

Goring bought a catalogue, and went into the south room. It was filled with studies, most of them unintelligible to him. He didn't know much about pictures, and nothing about the pictures of this especial artist. The exhibition had been commented upon a good deal, and like a good many others who take their art from the newspapers, he thought it was a thing to see. But the south room was a little too much for him, so he moved on to the west room, where most of the masterpieces were exhibited. There was a noticeable sameness about them all, a sameness of exquisite beauty of colouring, a sameness of conception and of treatment. But the public thronged to see them now, blindly worshipping what a few years before they had as blindly ridiculed.

The place was not crowded ; the New Gallery rarely is ; that is one of its advantages. Goring went slowly round the room, looking at the principal pictures. Presently he halted before one in the corner—a small one.

It was a picture of Circe, treated as only this great painter could treat her. Circe was pictured in her pavilion clad in a flowing robe, a tall willowy woman with full red lips, pouring out a luscious wine. A herd of swine were grouped on the marble floor, the table was spread, and through the lattice could be seen a white-sailed ship on a sapphire sea drawing nearer and nearer. The picture caught Goring's attention. He bent forward to look at it more closely.

As he turned away, he found himself confronted by two ladies who had been standing behind him, the taller of the two wore a broad-brimmed, Spanish hat, and rich velvet and furs. He recognised her directly, though he had not seen her for years. She was Lady Bradford.

Her eyes flashed recognition, but beyond that she made no sign. He would have beaten a retreat and have pretended not to have seen her, but the lady who was with her, Mrs. Massarene, bore

down upon him in an instant with extended hand.

"Ah! Sir Kenneth," she exclaimed in her usual breathless manner, "you have been admiring the Circe too, I see. Isn't she quite, quite wonderful?—the very type of the sweetness of sin. But I cannot imagine why she should turn her lovers into swine? So futile, wasn't it? The transformation would be quite unnecessary nowadays. Don't you think so? By the way, Laline—do you know Sir Kenneth Goring?—Lady Bradford—two such distinguished people ought to know one another."

The flush on Laline's cheeks deepened ever so little; she held out her hand with a smile.

"Sir Kenneth and I are old friends," she said in her rich musical voice, without a trace of embarrassment. "We knew one another in India—let me see, two—three, I am positively ashamed to say how many years ago."

"Four years. But Lady Bradford is one of those people with whom time seems to stand still," said Goring gallantly.

After all, he was bound to have met her sooner or later. Mrs. Massarene he knew—everyone knew Mrs. Massarene, and she was Lady Bradford's great



friend. Society is small, and they had many acquaintances in common. He had no feeling about her now one way or another, and if she were disposed to forget the past—well, so was he. It had been for the best. He felt vaguely surprised that meeting her should have affected him so little. Once, a look of hers was enough to set his heart thumping and his pulses thrilling; now, he was only conscious of a momentary sensation of surprise, and a faint sense of embarrassment.

Laline flashed him back a gracious look. He couldn't help thinking how handsome she was. She had gained an air and manner which in India had been lacking.

Mrs. Massarene looked from one to the other with a roguish smile.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed audaciously. "I had no idea that you were old friends. Laline, you have never told me, and I flattered myself that you told me everything. Have you been into the north room, Sir Kenneth? No. Neither have we. Come and pick out the best pictures for us. I don't mean the ones people talk most about, for in art anything which is popular is necessarily bad, but the ones you like best."

Goring could hardly have refused, even if he had wished to do so. They went into the next room, and pretended to look at the pictures. It was astonishing how easily Goring and Laline fell into conversation; but embarrassment was impossible with Mrs. Massarene. That lady was in high spirits; she kept up an incessant chatter of nonsense. After a perfunctory survey of the pictures, she turned her attention elsewhere.

"Look at that person," she said, and she indicated a damsel with tousled head and sage-green gown, who was laboriously making notes in her catalogue. "No, she is not a critic, I am sure. I am told that a large number of strange people religiously scribble in their catalogues, and lend them round to their friends—to save sixpence, or to air their views on art. They would be almost worth reading—once. The *Nude in Art* as viewed by the young person, or the Royal Academy as approved by the British matron and the country clergy! They always approve of the Academy; that is why it is so commonplace. Imagine one asking the British matron what one should like in the way of art; it would be like consulting the country clergy about the pleasantest vices."

"And yet you asked me," laughed Goring, "about the pictures—not the vices! You are not consistent."

"You are so wholesomely and confessedly ignorant," she rejoined; "and from honest ignorance one learns more than from dishonest knowledge."

"Moya is consistent only in her inconsistency," said Lady Bradford, desirous of turning the conversation in her direction. "What do you think of the pictures—Sir Kenneth?"

She had not called him "Sir Kenneth" before. The distant form sounded unfamiliarly on his ears.

"I think—oh, I hardly know what I think," he said hurriedly. "Mrs. Massarene has found me out. I'm utterly ignorant of art. I suppose they're all right; but they seem to me a little too much up in the clouds, don't you know—rather unreal—they're all the same thing."

"I agree with you," said Laline. "I am wholesomely Philistine too. They have no variety. And they are certainly unreal. Whoever saw women with complexions like that?" She indicated a group of limp maidens. "I prefer a picture of a buxom dairymaid."

"And I don't agree with you," said Mrs. Massarene. "If you want reality, a coloured photograph would do very well, or a study in the nude like an anatomical chart, the sort of thing you see at Burlington House."

"It would be truer to life, anyway," said Laline drily.

"But the truth isn't art; there is nothing so crude as truth. Any fool can tell the truth, but a really good lie is a work of art. Don't you think so, Sir Kenneth?"

"I am afraid I don't know," he said, laughing. "Any poor attempts of mine, in that line, have been too clumsy for me to pose as an authority. I'm invariably found out. But I'm not a realist."

"Neither am I," said Mrs. Massarene. "If I were I should write a dull and dirty novel, make my heroine a housemaid, analyse the contents of her pails, and get the book advertised by the Social Pruriency Society as having a powerful moral—like that little man with the long name—you know whom I mean, Laline."

"I don't know," said Laline shortly. She was beginning to feel a trifle weary of these dissertations; she could hardly get in a word with Goring edge-

ways. "I detest little men; they remind me of blights; their inches are always in an inverse ratio to their conceit. Little men have no business to exist; they ought to be exterminated for the benefit of the race."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Massarene, with an amused glance, "what a holocaust there would be! You have been imbibing Mrs. Jack Eveline's theories. Ah! that reminds me—I promised to meet her at five o'clock at Lady Lochsporrans'. We are getting up some Sunday evenings for the people. Sunday evenings are so dull, aren't they? For us, I mean, not the people—they have the picturesque public-houses. We delude ourselves that by singing to them all out of tune, we are paving the way for our and their salvation. I wonder they come to hear us—but they do." She looked at the jewelled watch on her wrist. "Positively, it is five already; I must be going. . . . . No, Sir Kenneth, pray don't trouble. . . . . My brougham's waiting outside. Ta-ta, Laline—I shall see you to-night. Good-bye."

A minute later and she was gone. Goring and Laline were left standing at the top of the steps which lead down to the central hall. There was a moment of silence.

"Shall we sit down for a minute?" said Laline, cutting short his intention to take his leave. "I am tired of looking at pictures—and, besides, there is nothing more to be seen."

They crossed over to one of the settees underneath the balcony. The lamps had been lit, and people had thinned off for tea. The place was practically deserted. The tiny fountain splashed musically into its marble basin. The specimens of illuminated books and wrought metal-work which were exhibited here attracted few. An art-student, conspicuous by her ugly dress and unkempt hair, lingered over an illuminated edition of the Omar Khayyam at the far end, and one or two people passed and repassed, but these were all.

Lady Bradford toyed with her muff for a minute, and made some inane remark about a bronze bust hard by. Goring answered it after its kind.

Then she came to the point.

"I want to know if you have forgiven me?" she said, looking him full in the eyes.

He did not pretend to misunderstand her.

"Forgiven you! of course I have," he replied, with a heart-whole smile. "Besides, I don't know

that there was anything to forgive. I daresay I was very unreasonable."

She bit her beautiful lips. His indifference piqued her; it was evidently unassumed. She was the sort of woman who overlooks everything except the fact that a man does not want her.

"And yet—you were very angry with me at the time," she said in a low voice.

Her thoughts flew back to the night when they had parted outside the club at Elysium under the starlit sky. She had never spoken to him from then until now. He was very angry then; now he did not care. The truth was bitter.

"Well, I was a bit upset at the time," he confessed apologetically. "I daresay I cut up rough. I was hit all of a heap. However, let us forget all about it. I daresay all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. One tries to think so."

He gave a little sigh; he was thinking of Madeleine. Laline thought the sigh was for her. Her heart gave a leap. She leaned towards him and spoke softly, rapidly.

"Yes, let us forget, if we—if I—can forget, that is. You were hard upon me; it was natural. You did not know all. I was a girl then, haunted by



the fear of poverty, tempted by the love of wealth, goaded by the cruelty of those who should have shielded me, I had none to counsel, none to warn. What wonder if I was dazzled? I did not know what it all meant—now I know—too late.”

He looked at her, surprised. Her face was in the shadow; her eyes were shining.

“But you are happy, I hope?” he said.

“Happy!” she echoed with a short laugh. “Do I look happy?”

“Well, yes,” he said candidly, determined to steer clear of sentiment; “I am bound to say you do. I was thinking this afternoon how well you were looking.”

He heard of her everywhere, as a fashionable beauty, brilliant, courted, and caressed. Her photographs were in the shop-windows, flanked by high church parsons and no-church actresses. He saw her to-day, richly dressed, smiling, the embodiment of superb health. He judged accordingly.

Lady Bradford put up her muff to her mouth to hide her disappointment.

“How little men understand women,” she said with an impatient sigh. “They judge of them



by themselves—and from the surface merely. Men never know what it is to smile—and smile, and smile—while the heart is aching. *Ay de mi!*”

He edged a little further off; these confidences were dangerous. She noted the gesture, and dropped for the nonce her favourite rôle of an unhappy wife who yearns for sympathy, and took up a lighter tone. She gave him a reassuring smile, with a little blush at the end—one of those smiles she had never known to fail.

“Ah, well,” she said lightly, “we women are strange creatures; you must not take us too seriously. Now that we have met again, I hope you will come and see me. You will be in town for some time, will you not? We are in Eaton Square—do come.”

Goring hesitated, not because he had any objection to calling on Lady Bradford, rather the reverse, but his relations with her husband were, to put it mildly, somewhat strained. His last recollection of him was when he knocked him down in Mrs. Dampier’s bungalow.

She saw what was passing in his mind, and continued with a scarcely perceptible pause.

“Sir John, I regret to say, is a great invalid; he

is always confined to his room. He has his friends ; I have mine. He goes his way ; I go mine—that is understood. You will come to see me—me, do you understand ? Do come ; you will meet many old friends—the Fitzpoodles, the Lochsporrans, Captain Davenport, Lord Kilkenny—” she hesitated a little over this name, “and—lots of others. They will all be delighted to see you again, I am sure. It will do you good ; you look as though you wanted brightening up.”

It was impossible to refuse. He promised, with a mental reservation that he would only leave a card.

The mention of Davenport and the others seemed to launch Laline on a flood of Indian reminiscence. She guided through it with considerable skill, carefully avoiding forbidden subjects. She laughingly recalled one comic incident after another, and exerted all her powers to please. Goring caught her mood ; she had him on the rebound, and they were soon laughing and talking to one another as though the past had never been. The gallery emptied, and became almost deserted. They were quite surprised when the attendants, hovering around, reminded them that it was six o'clock—closing time.

Goring saw her into her carriage, which was waiting outside, and gave the word "Home." Just as the horses were moving on she leaned forward, and murmured with a smile.

"I am so glad that we are friends again."

Goring lifted his hat with an answering smile as the carriage rolled away.

It wasn't until he found himself in Pall Mall, and was going up the steps of his club, that he remembered, with a twinge of compunction, that for the last hour he had thought very little about Madeleine.

## CHAPTER XLI.

A FOG hung over everything like a pall. It was not a dry, dense fog, but a raw, damp one, through which the street lamps loomed with a sullen glare. There was a great crowd in High Street, Marylebone. It was Saturday night, and on Saturday the relics of an old-world fair still linger around High Street, Marylebone. The shops had bourgeoned out upon the pavement, and booths were drawn up alongside the gutters—booths on which divers articles were temptingly displayed. Pyramids of oranges, clusters of bananas, stacks of butchers' meat, strings of boot-laces, piles of sweetstuff, baskets of cabbages, sacks of potatoes, trays of cheap jewellery, mounds of fish, fried and unfried—such were some of the wares set forth enticingly before possible buyers. The gross glare of the naphtha lights flared into the faces of the crowd, and glimmered on the wet, greasy pavement. It was a typical English crowd, made up of buyers and

sellers, of hard-faced women with baskets, sullen-looking men, dirty children, all of the same dingy hue. Now and then the blue blouse of a butcher, or the red coat of a soldier, gave a dash of colour to the crowd, but for the most part it was leaden-hued. Despite the damp, foggy night, there was a brisk trade doing, and the haggling of the buyers, and the raucous cries of the booth-keepers, rose and fell in unmusical cadence. In one spot a vendor of quack medicines was shouting himself hoarse over the superlative merit of some cure-all pills, and emphasising his remarks by occasional appeals to a hideous anatomical chart fixed on a pole beside him. In another place an Italian organ-grinder was grinding out metallic melodies.

Beyond the noisy crowd, just out of earshot of the brazen-throated quack doctor and the ear-torturing organ-grinder, there lay a mean side street. At the corner a gaudy gin palace flared out like a wrecker's light upon the darkness, but the rest of the street was in dimly-lighted gloom. At the far end, where it terminated abruptly in a *cul-de-sac*, a simple gas-lamp lighted up the Café Bologna.

There was nothing externally about the Café Bologna which marked it out from the ordinary run of dingy eating-houses or cheap Italian restaurants. There were divers unappetising viands, a few tomatoes, and a dirty bill of fare in the window. Inside, two or three melancholy men were eating their frugal suppers at the round tables ranged around the room. It was only when one passed the signal to the sleek, olive-hued Italian, who united in his person the offices of proprietor and head-waiter, or gave the word to the big greasy woman who presided over the counter at the far end of the room, that one was permitted to pass through the little door at the back of the bar, and the real nature of the Café Bologna revealed itself.

At the end of a dimly-lighted passage a swing-door opened abruptly upon a flight of stairs which ran down to the basement. At the foot of the stairs there was another door and another passage. At the end of the passage were two rooms, which at one time, had probably served as kitchens, but which were now the head-quarters of the Levantine Club.

The Levantine Club was one of those many night-clubs and gambling hells which have spread of late years like a noxious undergrowth beneath the superficial respectability of London life. The law-abiding householder is occasionally made aware of their existence by the spasmodic activity of the authorities and a stray raid of the police. But for the most part their existence is discreetly winked at, and they flourish unchecked, a standing witness of the truth that by suppressing the outward symptom of an evil, we cause it to break forth all the more virulently beneath the surface.

The Levantine Club differed from many, and was akin to many, in that it contained a large foreign element of the baser sort. A good many of its members were foreign revolutionists of the worst type, who met here partly to gamble, and partly to mature secret plots against the governments of the countries which gave them birth, and perchance against the country of their adoption. Thus do these alien snakes warm themselves on our hospitable hearth.

It was only about half-past ten o'clock, and the rooms were not yet full. There was a large room,



and a small one communicated with it. Both were furnished after much the same fashion, with tarnished red velvet settees and marble-topped tables. A few tawdry gilt mirrors broke the row of gas-lamps round the walls. There were a good many cane-bottomed chairs, and a good many card-tables, lined with dirty green baize, and in the larger room there was a long table, which was still covered with a cloth. In both rooms the windows were shuttered and heavily curtained, so as to prevent any glimmer of light from being seen on the outside.

The foreign element was conspicuous at a glance, though there was a good deal of the native product present as well. Two or three cut-throat Italians were hob-nobbing over a revolutionary rag in one corner; one or two truculent Frenchmen were jabbering and gesticulating over their cognac. Two men of doubtful nationality were playing piquet. A motley group of German Jews and English had joined two of the card-tables together, and were playing poker in the big room. But the rooms were not yet full, for the members of the Levantine Club were late birds for the most part.



As the hour wore on there was a constant succession of arrivals. They came dropping in by one and two and three, and the rooms filled rapidly, until nearly every table was occupied. The energies of the waiter were taxed to the utmost, as he darted to and fro with glasses. At last the proprietor, having closed the shop above, had to come down to lend a helping hand. The air of the low-ceilinged room was thick with tobacco smoke and hot with the flare of the gas-jets. The babel of voices went on unceasingly, rising now and again into a noisy outburst from the poker players as they squabbled over the cards.

A little after midnight a man entered and took a leisurely survey round. Apparently the result was unsatisfactory, for he shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of contempt. He was a short, stout German Jew, with a clean-shaven face and full lips. There was a general air of opulence about him, which was shared by a few others in the room. He took off his fur coat and handed it to the waiter. He was in evening dress, and his thick fingers glittered with rings.

At the far end of the room a man was sitting by

himself. A half-smoked cigar was between his lips, and he was ruefully regarding his empty glass. The Jew's eyes lighted on him for a moment, and then he made his way across to the table where he was, and, pulling up a chair, he sat down opposite to him.

The man in possession of the table gave him a sullen nod, and went on puffing at his cigar. He was Wortley Dampier, but Wortley Dampier run to seed. Few would have recognised in the shady individual smoking the Jersey cigar the once dashing officer of Her Majesty's 111th regiment. The last eighteen months had worked sad havoc with Captain Wortley Dampier. His beard was unkempt, and streaked with grey; the hair had worn away from his temples, the loose skin had puckered under his eyes. His shabby clothes hung loosely on his gaunt form. Drink had done much, and the dread of detection had done more. Dampier had lost his nerve; his luck was against him, and he knew it.

"Nasty night," said the Hebrew affably.

Dampier grunted.

"Have a drink?" he asked, rapping the table with his stick.

Dampier brightened.

"Hi, kellner! bring two viskies, sharp."

He selected a fat cigar from a well-filled case, lit it, and began to smoke.

The drinks came presently, and Dampier thawed.

"Going to take the bank to-night?" he said, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the long table, now divested of its cloth. "They've been waiting for you or Cohen to turn up," he said grimly.

The Jew laughed, and passed his fat fingers through his sleek hair.

"They'll have to wait, then," he said, with a well-fed laugh. "No, no! my goot friend; the risk is too great. Besides," he gave a comprehensive glance, "there's no one here to-night. The game's not worth the candle—rather not."

He laughed again, and took a gulp at his whisky. Dampier looked at him, half in disgust, half in envy. There could be hardly a greater contrast than these two men, so far as externals went.

The broken ejaculations of the poker players rose and fell, and then swelled into a roar.

"They seem to be bluffing it pretty stiff over there," said Dampier.

"Too much noise," said the other contemptuously. "I don't suppose they've raised much of a pot. Going to have a cut in?"

"I want to," said Dampier, "if—"

He leaned his arms upon the table, and looked across at his companion.

Their eyes met for a minute.

"Pooh!" said the Hebrew, as if answering a question, and flicking the ash off his cigarette, "you drink too much, my goot friend."

"I swear I have hardly touched a drop to-day," said Dampier; "I'm as sober as a judge. Look here," and he held out a steady hand. "Fact is, Meyer," he went on, "I've been down on my luck lately. All the favourites have won. I backed Rosamund for the Spring Meeting, and—"

"Lost," said the other, curtly finishing the sentence. "Well?"

Dampier leant across the table and lowered his voice.

"Look here, Meyer," he said. "Lend me a

tenner. I want to take a cut in presently." He looked towards the poker-players. "They're warming up; that sallow-faced chap's a regular high roller. I've only got to play low a bit and bide my time. I can't lose—you know that."

Meyer looked at him, and fingered his heavy watch-chain.

"No, but you might be found out," he said in the same low tone, "and where'd my tenner be then? And there'd be the devil to pay besides! No, no! too risky. Besides, that business of the 'bug's' pretty well played out. No good trying it on here anyhow."

"It isn't the 'bug,'" answered Dampier, in a hoarse whisper. "It's a very different sort of 'hold-out' to that, I tell you. There's no risk; I've never known it fail. Only a tenner. We'll halve the winnings."

Meyer looked at him narrowly, and fumbled in his pocket. There was a loud outburst from the poker-table, a coarse laugh, an oath or two, a shout of exultation.

"They're half drunk already; I've been watching them this hour past—come, Meyer."

"Half-winnings," said the other meditatively. "It's risky, damned risky. . . . But—I'll do it. Here you are." He slid a little pile of gold across the table under his hand. "Now, mind you're careful ; play low at first. Don't make the straddle too soon."

Dampier nodded, and dropped the coins in his pocket. They went on smoking again as though nothing had happened. One or two men came up and asked Meyer if he was going to take the bank presently. He put them off with the usual formula, and they went away discontented. Apparently no one would risk a bank to-night.

The interest, therefore, centred on the poker-players. Presently Dampier got up and went over to them. The ring had widened, another table had been added, and though they were playing a comparatively quiet game, the excitement was fast and furious. Two or three men, notably a young fellow in evening dress, and another, a sallow-faced man (an American evidently), were bluffing it rather recklessly. The American nearly always won. They were playing table stakes, for there was no trust at the Levantine Club, and Dampier looked longingly

at the big pile of chips before the American. After he had been watching some few minutes, one of the players got up with a sickly smile and declared himself dead broke. Dampier took his chair, and began to play quietly. He knew his game thoroughly, and he had one of the most valuable qualities of a good poker-player, cheek. But he lacked that other necessary commodity, patience. And, latterly he couldn't keep cool for long together. But he managed to keep himself in hand for a time, and did well. Meyer had also taken a hand. He was playing a very modest game with all the solemn mysteriousness of a practised player, and bluffing not at all.

The fever of gambling was in the air. The room grew hotter, and thicker with smoke ; the trade in drinks grew brisker, the faces of the men round the table grew more flushed. A second poker-table had been started in another part of the room, and gradually the groups around one or the other absorbed most of those in the rooms. The light of the gas flashed back from the tawdry mirrors to the faces of the cards and the little piles of money on the tables. There was little said except the



monotonous litany of the cards, broken now and then by an oath or a laugh, or by somebody calling for drink, or swelling into a general babble of voices, and when a winner raked in the pot.

For nearly an hour the game at Dampier's table kept pretty even, and Dampier fairly cool. He was playing a careful game, winning steadily, but not heavily, but he was never a man who could brook winning slowly, and latterly least of all. The success mounted to his brain and intoxicated him. He called for more drink, and began to bluff recklessly. Practically, he had only one rival in this respect, and that was the sallow-faced American; the more youthful competitor had been cleared out. Presently Dampier began to pull ahead, and in another half-hour a large hole was made in the American's pile. At one stage the American caught three deuces, and did some heavy bluffing. Dampier held a full hand.

By-and-by a jack-pot became very fat. The excitement was intense. Dampier hesitated a minute, then he came in and drew four cards.

The American, who had opened the pot, bet £5. Dampier raised the same. Meyer, the



third player, dropped out, as the opener had not drawn any cards. It being the turn of the opener, he raised another £5. Dampier doubled. This sort of thing see-sawed for a little time. The others looked on breathlessly. It was a duel between the two; they had been rivals all the evening

“How many cards did you draw?” asked the American.

“Four,” answered Dampier, not noticing the glitter in the other’s eyes.

“Pretty hot on a four card - draw,” said an onlooker.

Dampier did not hear the remark; his face was flushed, and his hand was shaking.

“Well?” he said, interrogatively.

The American called.

Dampier laid down his hand, ace, king, queen, jack, and ten spot of clubs.

There was a chorus of astonishment, an outburst of envious amazement.

The American’s lips twitched, but he said nothing.

Dampier put out his hand to rake in the pot, when, with a sudden spring across the table, the

American caught him by the wrist with one hand, and whipping out a knife with his other, he ripped Dampier's waistcoat open downwards to his hips.

A shower of cards fell out.

In an instant, confusion, riot, cursing, and blasphemy reigned supreme. Dampier was on his feet and grappling with his antagonist. But the American was strong and wiry; he held on like grim death. In the struggle to separate the two men, the tables were overturned, the chairs knocked down, and the money rolled all about the floor. Everyone shouted at once, and all gathered in a black mass around the two struggling combatants on the floor. The American had got Dampier down again in spite of his struggles. Others had helped. In fact, he seemed in a fair way of being torn to pieces by the infuriated mob.

In vain Meyer pleaded for no violence; he tried to get between the two men.

The proprietor frantically called for quiet; he could scarcely be heard in the tumult.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! silence, silence! The police—will raid the house down! We shall be discovered!"

In vain. Bloodshed seemed imminent. Suddenly his wife, aroused by the noise, rushed down from above.

“*Madre de Dio!*” she screamed, “there will be murder; we shall be ruined!”

Quick as thought, she rushed into the next room. There was a pail of dirty water; it had been used to rinse the glasses. She picked it up in her brawny arms, and before anyone could guess what she was doing she had rushed into the room again and discharged the contents full upon the two struggling men. There was a roar of laughter, and a confused sound of curses and spluttering. For a moment the American loosed his hold, startled by this novel mode of attack. The woman precipitated her large bulk upon him like a feather bed.

Dampier sprang to his feet and made for the door.

“Quick, quick!” said the Italian, throwing himself in the way of possible pursuers; “run—run for your life!”

And Dampier ran.

## CHAPTER XLII.

OUTSIDE, the fog had lifted somewhat ; the sparse lamps were clearer seen, a swirl of air blew round the corner of the street and swept a piece of paper along the pavement with a shuffling sound. A muffled noise came up through the rusty iron railings from the basement, but no fleck of light was visible. The shutters did their work well.

Dampier hurried along, his head down, the echo of that roar sounding in his ears long after it had died away. The haunting fear, the dread of detection, which had never left him day nor night for the last eighteen months, and which had done more to break his nerve than even the drink, was strong upon him ever—accentuated by the present terror into unreasoning panic.

He crossed the High Street at a shambling walk, afraid to run lest he should attract attention. He need not have been afraid. The long street

was deserted now save for a stray policeman or a belated woman. All traces of the Saturday market had long since disappeared—the public-houses were closed; Sunday had set in.

He plunged into the labyrinth of dingy streets on the eastern side—instinct rather than motive guiding him down one alley and up another. He was conscious of nothing but the dread of pursuit until he found himself inside the door of his lodging, and was stumbling up the narrow stairs.

He pushed open the door of a room on the top-most floor, and went in.

It was a small room with a low and bulging ceiling. The carpet was ragged and impregnated with dirt, the glass was bleared—the whole place in a state of slatternly disorder. Two or three pairs of uncleaned boots were thrown into one corner; on the table, guiltless of cloth, was a plate of cold potatoes; one or two dilapidated French novels and a *Pink Un* were on the floor; a shabby chair or two and an old shawl completed the furniture.

A woman was huddled up before the meagre fire, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting on her

hands, the whole attitude suggestive of dogged despondency. A half-empty brandy bottle was conspicuous among the litter on the mantel; a sooty kettle was on the fire. Apparently she had not long come in. She still wore her hat; her shabby boots were wet with mud, and a waterproof and umbrella were thrown on the floor alongside. She had turned up the skirt of her dress, and the muddy boots and dirty petticoat seemed to mock the flaunting head-gear.

Dampier gave her a look. He took off his wet coat, and shuffled into an old overcoat which was hanging upon a peg behind the door. The woman did not change her attitude. She made no sign of being conscious of his presence.

“So you’re back already—are you?” was his remark.

She shrugged her shoulders by way of reply.

Dampier scowled at her back.

“What, no luck either?” he blurted out.

That roused her to speech.

“*Tu n’as pas gagné?*” she shot from between her teeth.

Dampier strode across to the mantel-shelf. He

seized the bottle, poured out some brandy, and drank it off.

“Won!” he exclaimed, with an oath; “rather not. Lost—worse than lost—Julie, the game’s up—I’m done for.”

The note of utter hopelessness in his voice made her figure suddenly stiffen. She pushed back her chair, and looked up at him. The coarse gas-jet flared down on her gaudy hat and painted face.

“Done for!” she echoed shrilly. “What is that you say? *Je ne vous comprends pas.*” Then her glance travelled over him, his dishevelled hair, torn collar, his wet clothes. “*Ah! je le comprends bien. Vous voilà pincé!*”

“That’s about it,” he said. “I planned it with Meyer—the vest ‘hold-out’; you know there was no risk—it was just the same as before—I was winning. But a d—d sallow-faced brute was there. He spotted me. There was the devil’s own row—I bolted as soon as I could get away.”

He passed his shaking hand over his brow. He made another move for the brandy bottle.

She snatched it from him, and hid it between her knees.

“*Souillard !*”

She hurled the word at him through her clenched teeth, her face working. Then the floodgates loosed. For the next few minutes she poured forth a torrent of vituperation. Paris *argot*, Piccadilly slang, French and English jumbled up together, came forth pell-mell. Dampier retorted after his kind. It would be difficult to say which had the worst, or the best, of it. If his vocabulary lacked in variety, it was at least equal in vigour and foulness.

The awakened lodger underneath turned over in his bed, and cursed them. He was familiar with the rows of the couple on the top floor ; but the one to-night lasted longer than usual. He got up and banged at the ceiling with his boot. That brought about a lull.

For a moment they glared at one another speechless.

“So you are found out,” she hissed, in a lowered voice. “If you had kept sober this would not have been so. *C’est impossible*; but it is drink—drink—drink! We have not one sou. . . . *Mais, non!*” A change flashed across her face. “But you won,



you said—you have brought away your winnings? Is it not so?"

He dived his hands into his pockets, and drew forth two gold pieces and some silver. These he smacked down on the mantelpiece.

"That's all—I didn't even know there was that—they were too quick for me. I was dragged down; the tables were knocked over, my pile spilt. It was all that sallow brute. Curse him!—he got his knife out and had got me by the throat—I couldn't move."

Her anger broke forth again, muffled this time.

"Fool!" she hissed, her painted face convulsed with rage. "*Tu es impossible!* No wonder the gang threw you over. It is Burwood over again, always blunder, always found out. There, if you had only carried off the diamonds—here, if you had only kept the money. *Mais, c'est toujours la même chose—toujours.* And I—I—believed your fine promises, and this is to what you bring me—*voilà!*"

She waved her hand round the squalid room with a gesture of ineffable contempt. Certainly it was not an inviting residence; and the glimpse of

the sleeping-room, seen through the half-open door, revealed the same state of disorder.

Dampier gave vent to a laugh.

"Come," he said roughly, "drop that, and clear aside. I want to get a bit of the fire. I bring you to it! I like that. Why, it was you who hung on to me. I didn't want you. And what about your share of the business? You've not everyone's money, you know. You've come back empty-handed too, I bet."

She folded her arms and nodded acquiescently, defiantly. But the taunt stung her, as any allusion to the lack of personal charms does women of her class—or indeed women of any class.

"Whose fault is it?" she retorted. "*C'est à vous*. Hadn't I to pledge my sealskin last week for you to back the winner? That's gone too."

She paused a minute, and gulped down something in her throat. He looked sullenly in the fire.

"And it was so cold and foggy to-night," she said, with a shiver. "Your poisonous fog chokes me. *Ce n'est pas comme Paris. Hélas!*"

She burst into tears abruptly.

Dampier sat down the other side of the fire,

lit his pipe, and looked at her critically. Her tears didn't move him ; he was used to them ; they were the usual end of these scenes.

He noted that she looked worn and haggard. Her mouth had coarsened a good deal, and was further marred by a broken front tooth. Two or three lines had cut themselves across the forehead. Her florid good looks had gone off, there was no doubt about that. The life she was leading had left its mark. He felt a spasm of disgust. Three years ago when he had first come across her he had desired her in a way ; he had found her useful to his plans, at Burwood for instance. But her passion, alternated by rage, had wearied him—worried him—until he came at last to hate her. And yet he could not shake her off. She clung to him fiercely. She had become necessary to him, she had gained over him a certain mastery which a passionate nature sometimes gains over a merely brutal one. He feared her. She knew too much. And she was needful to him—they were in partnership—if partnership it could be called—he squandering his ill-gotten gains, she sharing with him her unholy earnings. Of late he had almost lived on

her, for his run of ill-luck, drink, and dread, had dragged him down lower and lower.

Her sobs spent their force presently ; they were as much the result of much brandy and little supper as anything else. She sat snuffling and mopping her face with her dirty handkerchief. The black under her eyes had run into the rouge, and the rouge was blotched with her tears.

"*Je me sens bien fatiguée*," she whimpered. "I walked too far—and such a night!"

She lifted up one down-at-heel, mud-splashed boot as a proof of what she was saying.

He went on stolidly smoking, and glowered at the fire.

"It was so cold," she said again, "so cold without my sealskin, and no one— Ugh! I wish I was dead."

She put her damp handkerchief up to her marred mouth, and looked at him. She had got into a habit of hiding it so.

"Give me the brandy," was all he said.

She handed it to him without a word. He mixed himself a stiff glass with water from the kettle, took a pull, and went on smoking again.

He seemed to be turning something over in his mind. Julie eyed him narrowly, wistfully. By intuition she could almost tell the direction in which his thoughts were working.

"Of what are you thinking?"

He didn't answer immediately. He went on smoking. Presently he looked up.

"What's to be done?" he asked shortly.

"Done!" she echoed blankly. "Pardon—I do not understand."

"You'll have to understand, then," and he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "This sort of thing can't go on. You know that as well as I. Three weeks owing for rent—not a fiver in the house—no prospect of getting any more as far as I'm concerned—and as for you," he looked over her with a tipsy sort of contempt, "well, I don't think you'll pick up much either."

"I might, if I had my sealskin," she said. It was curious how her thoughts ran on that sealskin. She put her hand to her mouth again and flushed painfully. The womanhood in her was not quite dead.

"Sealskin or no sealskin, you don't get any," he

replied brutally, "and I don't see any prospect of your doing so. Meanwhile money's got to come from somewhere. Where's it to come from?"

She caught her breath; a driven look came into her eyes.

"*C'est terrible—mais je ne peux pas! Je ne peux pas!*" She paused thoughtfully. A swift look, half repugnance, half reluctance, swept over her face. "*Il y'a votre femme,*" she said tentatively.

Dampier shook his head.

"She's no good; she's got nothing."

"*Mais certainment.* If she desire she can squeeze out a little more. There is that Sir Kenneth, and *ces nouveaux riches*—those Americans. She can from them."

Dampier shook his head again despondingly.

"No go; I tell you she won't, and there's an end of her. Ever since you spotted her last January I've had it in my mind, and I've looked her up. I've been telling her the same thing—only last week. She's as obstinate as a mule, and it don't do to press her too far. I might get a few pounds, perhaps, if I tried her again, but," with all the

scorn of a millionaire, "what's the good of a few pounds to a man like I?"

The woman in the chair stiffened with sudden anger.

"Last week!" she exclaimed, a look of jealous suspicion flushing over her face. "*Vous l'avez vu la dernière semaine*—and I have not known! You have been hiding it from me, you—*Dieu!*"

Her eyes flashed. Her passion for this man was the jealous passion which trends on hate.

Dampier blinked at her angrily; the brandy was beginning to mount to his brain.

"You don't know everything, you see," he said in an aggravating tone. "Why shouldn't a man go to see his wife? Why shouldn't a wife give her husband a lift if she's a mind to—or rather if he's a mind for her to do so? Where did you think I got the money to go on with? You couldn't get it. You're not the only woman in the world."

"Ah!" she said, her face quivering with fury, "so that's it, is it? And all the while I have been—*Bête!* Go back to your white-faced woman. Why don't you go back to her? *Mon Dieu!* You drive me too far. I could kill her—and you too!"

She clenched her hands upon the arms of the chair ; her eyes blazed.

He sat stolid. Frequent scenes had taken the edge off this sort of thing ; he only scowled at her.

"Stop that row," he said, "or by—! I'll take you at your word. I'm about tired of this. I'd rather be anywhere than hung up with a hell-cat like you—so now you've got it."

He finished off his brandy, and made as if to rise.

Their eyes met, and held one another. His were sullen, hers threatening. The flickering light in hers showed to him her weakness. He could tame her. The angry retort died away. She made a wavering gesture, then slid down at his feet and threw her arms around his knees.

"*Je t'aime*," she murmured passionately, "you shall not go. *Je t'aime*, I will find the money, only give me time—only—"



## CHAPTER XLIII.

IT was about ten o'clock in the evening. Madeleine was sitting in her room. Except for half an hour in the morning to do her meagre marketing, she had not been out of doors all day. She felt unequal to the effort. Her sense of lassitude had grown greater as the weeks wore on. And, besides, she had nothing to call her out. The dreary pastime of taking a solitary walk to nowhere in particular, and for nothing in particular, did not tempt her. The Easter holidays were going on now, and with them had come a respite from her daily drudgery in Harley Street. But the respite was hardly a welcome one, since it threw her back more upon herself, and gave her more time to think. And with wearisome iteration her thoughts went over and over again the ground of her interview with Goring. That was six weeks ago; since then she had spent hours in solitary communing, reasoning and counter-reasoning; at one time

almost yielding, at another sternly resisting. It could hardly be called a conflict of reason against love, because, as a rule, when a woman invokes her reason it is a sign that she is going to yield to her heart. It was rather a strife between her love and her religion, and when two such unreasonable forces are at war with one another, the struggle is apt to be a stubborn one. The sight of Goring, the sound of his pleading, had, if possible, fanned her love to a whiter flame. Another element had been added, a little leaven, but one which was already leavening all her thoughts. She had heard through Mimi Eveline that Goring had renewed his acquaintance with Lady Bradford. Mimi had mentioned it casually one day when she came to see her, though she did not mention it without intent. Madeleine made no comment, but it was one more drop in her cup of bitterness. She trusted him, but she feared.

She was going over it to-night as she bent over her work, and with a dull pain in her heart she was recalling how he had loved Laline in India—how long ago those days seemed now. Lady Bradford was his first love. The light of the lamp

glinted on Madeleine's brown hair, and lit up her pale, patient face. Her lips were quivering in spite of herself. It may be that recollection is the only heaven out of which we cannot be driven; sometimes it is the only hell we cannot leave.

Suddenly a pebble struck the window-pane.

She knew in an instant what it was; it was a sound she was always dreading. Her heart gave a great leap; the work slid from her lap to the floor.

The clock ticked out another minute. The sound was repeated. Her lips went white, but she did not move.

"I will not—I will not," she said to herself. "If he forces himself upon me he must take the risk."

Yet even as she thought her eyes dilated with terror. Then she remembered Goring, and a ray of comfort stole into her heart. She picked up her work again, and had regained some measure of calmness, when on her listening ears there smote the sound of an altercation in the passage below. He was forcing his way in. Well, she would end it to-night, once for all.

Heavy steps were heard ascending the stairs.

"Here's someone to see you, ma'am," said the landlady, opening the door. "I told 'im as how I thought you'd gone to bed—but he would make me come and see—and he's followed me up."

She stood aside to let the intruder pass, and sniffed suspiciously as she closed the door upon him and shuffled downstairs. She had her own ideas about Mrs. Dampier's visitor. She proceeded to impart them to her daughter when she regained the kitchen.

"There's more in that nor meets the eye," she announced oracularly, as she resumed her interrupted supper. "A more hang-dog feller I never set eyes on. What he can have to do with a lady like Mrs. Dampier beats me. It's my belief he's up to no good. Lock up the spoons, Eliza, and we'll sit up till he's safe off the premises. I wish the first floor wasn't away. It's bad to be without a man in the 'ouse, that it is. Three lone women—we might be robbed and murdered in our beds."

"Lor, Ma!" rejoined Eliza, "how you do go on. I declare I'm that frightened I can scarcely touch

a morsel. P'raps he's only a pore relation after all."

"Pore relation, be blowed!" rejoined Mrs. Greenaway; "he ain't no pore relation. I've half a mind to ask the p'leeceman into supper—if t'wasn't that he'd eat us out of house and home I would. It 'ud be some protection, at anyrate."

Meanwhile, the cause of this colloquy had gone out on the landing and watched over the banisters until the landlady's portly figure had safely disappeared into the nether regions. When he had satisfied himself he returned and closed the door carefully.

"Why didn't you come down and let me in?" he said gruffly. "You must have heard the signal. Why did you want to bring up that inquisitive old hag to spy on me?"

Madelcine had risen on his entrance. The table was between them. Every vestige of colour had left her face; her eyes were wide with repulsion. In truth, quite apart from any personal consideration, he was not a pleasant object to look upon. She had not seen him for nearly two months, and the change in that time was very marked. The

traces of muscular strength were still there ; but his eyes were bloodshot, his features puffed with drink, his beard was dirty and unkempt. It was evident that he had nearly run to the end of his tether.

"Well," he said, in his old bullying tone. He was uncomfortable under her searching glance. "Why don't you answer?"

"If you force yourself on me you must do so at your own risk," she said. "I will be no party to concealment. You have no right to come here at all."

He grunted, but made no reply. It was not his policy to offend her just now. He pulled up a chair and sat down on it.

"Have you got a drink?" he said. His shifty eyes wandered around the poor little room. The result of his survey was unsatisfactory.

An expression of disgust flitted over her face.

"There is nothing in the house," she said, truthfully enough.

Dampier muttered something, and looked down at the carpet. There was a moment's silence. She looked at the clock, it was half-past ten, and then at the embruted man opposite. Was there any

justice, human or divine, she asked herself, which demanded the sacrifice of her life's happiness to such an one as he?

"It is late," she said decidedly; "will you go, or must I ring for you to be shown out?"

She moved towards the bell, but he jumped up and intercepted her.

"Don't come any of your bluff over me," he said threateningly. "I shall stop here willy-nilly until I have got what I want; and you'll have to listen to me."

She looked at him helplessly. To reach either the door or the bell she must pass him. Escape was impossible.

"What is it you want?" she asked indignantly. "Money? I have none. I told you so when you were here last."

"You managed to screw out a trifle all the same," he said, with a grin.

"It was the last I could give you. I told you so at the time. You have drained me of every penny. I will not be subjected to this persecution. It is infamous! You are determined to give



me no alternative but to seek the law for protection."

"You will not do that," he said meaningly. "I know you better than that."

She put her hand to her side, and waited. The room seemed polluted by this man's presence.

"I have been hard pressed; they've got wind of me somehow. I feel sure of it. It's got too hot for me in England," he went on. "Things have gone badly with me since I saw you last. I have been led the devil's own life—no matter how or by whom; I can't stand it any longer. I want to get clear of the whole lot. If I could scrape up enough to pay my passage out to Argentina, and to give me a start there—that's all I want. You'd get quit of me once and for all, I should never come back. It isn't safe in London any longer; they're on my track. You know whom I mean."

She looked at him thoughtfully. She had heard most of this before.

"I have no money to give," she said, "even if I believed you—I do not."

"It is true; I swear it on my—" He was going to say honour, but something in her face checked



him. "You can take my ticket to Buenos Ayres, if you like. Only if you don't look sharp about it, I shall get another sort of ticket. They'll nab me before I have time to bolt."

Madeleine put her hand upon the table for support. A picture rose before her of this man whom she had vowed to honour and to serve, the father of her child, hand-cuffed, helpless, and in a felons' dock. What if he were telling the truth? And what if she refused to aid him?

"I have no money," she faltered. "The little I earn would not suffice, even if I could spare it—I cannot."

"No," said Dampier quickly; he noted her sign of yielding; "you have none yourself, that is true; but your friends have. What about those rich Americans? What about Goring? You have only to ask; and if it be to get rid of me," he said grimly, "they—he will give the money freely. It's for the last time too. I want to start afresh, I tell you. I want to get a fair chance. Here I have no chance at all; I am always hiding by day and prowling by night; living from hand to mouth, driven from pillar to post. What chance

have I? Come now, give me this last chance, and I swear I'll never trouble you again."

It was an unusually long speech for him. There was a ring of reality in it which made it difficult to doubt. Madeleine looked at him, and despite her aversion, she could not forbear a feeling of pity. He looked ten years older than his age, his hair and beard were grey, his face distorted, his shoulders bowed. Truly, she thought, the way of transgressors is hard. She considered a minute. She could not give him the money herself. There was Goring. Her face burned. No; she could not ask him. One can ask least of those whom they love most. Mrs. Eveline was away. There was Mrs. Jack Eveline; to ask her would be to have; she felt sure of that.

She looked up. Dampier was still standing, waiting, an unconcealed gleam of anxiety in his eyes.

"How much do you want?" she asked in a low voice.

"Two hundred," he answered. "A hundred might do at a pinch. But I should want a little money to give me a start when I got out there.

Two hundred would see me through comfortably."

"When do you wish to sail?" she asked.

"At once. The sooner the better. To-morrow if there's a boat, and if I have the money."

She thought a moment.

"You shall have the money," she said, "if I can get it—in a few days."

He made a movement towards her; his lips moved. She waved him back.

"I want no thanks," she said, her voice trembling. "It is not for you that I shall do this thing, but for the memory of—of one who is dead." She gulped down her emotion. "And now—leave me. I will send the money to you, I hope, in a few days. Where shall I send it? Give me your address?"

"No—no!" he exclaimed in alarm, "that won't do. She would get hold of it, and the game would be up. I'll come for it."

"She!" echoed Madeleine.

She fell back a step. He was living with that woman, then? She might have known it, had she considered. And then leaped up the thought, here

was fresh ground for a divorce did she desire one. But she thrust the temptation away from her resolutely, yet the fact remained. This was the man for whom she was to beg! "Oh, I cannot!" she uttered half-aloud.

He misunderstood her.

"You needn't be afraid," he said reassuringly. "She won't go with me, if that's what you mean. I mean to give her the slip, to shake her off; that's another reason why I'm so keen to be gone. I don't want her to know anything about it." He passed his hand over his brow; his face took an ugly look. "I've had more than enough of her, I can tell you; the she-devil!"

He brought his fist heavily down on the table.

"Oh! hush, hush!" cried Madeleine, shrinking back. "Of all men you are the last to say a word against her. She is a woman, and she— Ah! what is that?"

There was a shuffling sound against the door. Dampier started back cowering with terror. He lived in ever-present dread of detection.

It was the landlady. She had stolen upstairs on tiptoe, and for the last five minutes had been listen-

ing outside. In her eagerness to hear all, she had given a lurch and over-reached herself. Now she entered, apologetic and curious.

"I just come up to see if you wanted anything, ma'am, afore I went to bed. It's a-getting late," she added, with a keen glance from one to the other.

"There is nothing, thank you," said Madeleine. Then she seized the opportunity. "Mrs. Greenaway, will you kindly see this—gentleman downstairs? The gas is out in the passage, I am afraid. There is nothing more we need say to-night," she said, addressing Dampier, as the landlady held open the door. "If you will come here this day week it shall be as you wish."

She turned from him with a gesture of dismissal, and went into her bedroom adjoining. Dampier glared, the landlady coughed impatiently. As there was nothing else to be done, he followed her downstairs.

She slammed the hall door upon him, and bolted it.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

IN all London there is no more delightful spot than Carlton Gardens, if viewed from a residential point of view. In the heart of the greatest city of the world, yet hidden away behind Pall Mall, it is almost as quiet and secluded as the country. It makes a veritable oasis in the desert of London, an oasis which combines the maximum of retirement with the minimum of inconvenience. Of the half a dozen houses or so which go to make up Carlton Gardens, the Evelines' took the palm. Wealth can do much, art can do more; the combination of the two is irresistible, and both had been employed here with a lavish hand. Mrs. Jack Eveline knew her world, and she knew that the royal road to social success nowadays, and a coveted reputation for "smartness," is first to have the money, and secondly to know how to spend it. Luxury, beauty, comfort, can all be bought with money.

So she bought them along with the house in Carlton Gardens, and skilfully piloted by a needy peeress, whose acquaintance she had made at Homburg, she became in an incredibly short space of time a social success. In New York or Boston she would have found success much harder, on the principle of a prophet in his own country. But in London, with the aid of the peeress aforesaid, who superintended her visiting list, she had simply to throw open the doors of her beautiful house, entertain with prodigal luxury and extravagance, and the thing was done. Even royalty, masculine royalty, shed upon her the light of its presence. Of course her personal qualities of head and heart, her good nature, her vivacity—and audacity—counted for something. Both she and her husband were very popular. The men voted him a good sportsman and a first-rate fellow all round; the women declared her to be original and amusing, and excused all her eccentricities on the ground that she was a rich American. If she had been a poor one her “eccentricities” would have been “vulgarity,” and instead of being a “dear thing” she would have been a “horrid creature.” But she was not poor.



Mimi was resting in her snugery, which she called the "gold room," the one comfortable room in all the house, she was wont to declare, but that was an affectation. It was a harmony in yellow, and full of large soft couches, silken hangings and useless ornaments. It was on the ground floor. The window gave a glimpse, just visible in the dying light of the April day, of the strip of velvet turf and the tulip-beds which made up the miniature garden which overlooked St. James' Park. Beyond, there was a glimpse of the tops of the big elms just bursting into golden green. Mimi looked like a dainty bit of porcelain. She had donned a wonderful tea-gown of lace and silk, the tint of a blush rose. It was the hour before dressing for dinner, and she had been trying to kill the time by dipping into the pages of a magazine. But it didn't interest her particularly this evening. She threw it down with a yawn, and turned her thoughts to the more absorbing consideration of what dress she should put on presently, and whether Jack, who had run over to Paris for a few days, would turn up to-night or to-morrow morning. They had been down at



Burwood for Easter, and had only come up to town a few days ago. People were beginning to arrive, but the season had barely begun.

A tall footman, resplendent in plush and powder (Mimi had insisted on the plush and powder much against her husband's wish), threw open the door and announced :

"Mrs. Dampier."

"My dear Madeleine," exclaimed Mimi, jumping up and greeting her with effusion, "this is a surprise, and a pleasure too. So you've really come to see me at last. I'm more than glad to see you."

She kissed her on both cheeks, and then looked at her critically.

"My," she said, in a changed tone, "you do look poorly ; as pale as a potato, as they used to say out West. Now, I tell you what I shall do. I shall keep you here to-night, and we'll have a little frisk—I've got a box at the St. James' ; it's the first night of the new play. There's only Captain Davenport and Mrs. Massarene, so you'll stop to dinner with us and make the four—Jack's away. No, I sha'n't take any refusal. My maid will fix you up a gown in a twink. It will do you all the

good in the world. You look as if you wanted a pick-me-up."

Madeleine sat down in a chair, a shabby little figure in all this splendour. The colour was coming and going on her cheeks; her heart was beating. None but herself knew what it cost her to come here on her errand.

"I can't, Mimi," she said wistfully. "Don't urge me. I'm not—I'm not in the mood. When you have heard why I have come, you will see that I cannot."

She leaned back with an exhausted air; her lips trembled. Mimi's welcome touched her almost to tears.

"You poor dear," exclaimed Mimi, taking it all in at a glance. "Well, we'll say no more about it until you have told me all that is on your mind. But, first of all, let me give you some tea—yes—yes—you must—I insist."

She rang the bell, and gave the order. When the servant came with the tray, she met him at the door and brought it across to Madeleine, and ministered to her with her own hands. When she had finished she came and sat down beside her, and took her hand in hers.

"Now, dear," she said kindly, "tell me everything—everything. I will help you if I can."

A red flush flowed over Madeleine's face, and ebbed whitely.

"Oh! Mimi," she began, "how good you are. It is hard to ask—but I have no one else but you."

And then she went on in broken sentences to tell her tale. She hadn't gone far before Mimi interrupted her with a sudden gesture.

"That'll do, dear," she said. "Don't fret yourself to tell me any more. Consider the thing done—there—there," checking her thanks, "don't make such a fuss about it. It's a mere flea-bite. We 'Mericans have got our faults, but we don't do things in a piccayunish sort of way. You can have the money, and as much more as you like."

She got up promptly, crossed over to her writing-table, and took out her cheque-book. "Say now—how much more shall it be?" she said coaxingly.

But Madeleine would not take a penny more; all entreaties were in vain. Seeing that the suggestion distressed her, Mimi forbore.

"Here it is, dear," she said, folding up the cheque

in an envelope, and bringing it to her. "Take it with all my heart. May it be a good riddance to bad rubbish—that's all I can say. I should be spry, though, to see that he really clears out; he's a shoddy lot."

Madeleine reassured her.

"Well, I'm real glad to hear it," said Mimi. "Only, one can never be sure of a bad egg. Now, do stay to-night, and let me brighten you up a little. You can't cash that cheque until the morning, anyway."

Madeleine shook her head.

"I cannot, Mimi. Do not ask me. I must get back. If I were to stay here with you, even for a night, it would make it all the harder for me. I have put my hand to the plough, I cannot turn aside. Besides, I don't want to be a kill-joy; I am not very strong—I—I—have been much worried lately, and I—am very unhappy."

She broke down, and burst into tears. She was over-wrought. The least thing, kindness most of all, upset her now.

Mimi stood watching her, a mixture of compassion and impatience on her pretty face. She

was intensely sorry for her, intensely sympathetic, but she could not enter into all the emotions of this finer spun nature. It was her boast that many things which people call the mysteries of life were no mysteries to her. It might be so, but, undoubtedly, with her greater knowledge had come a lesser reverence. Whether the gain was worth the loss, who shall say? Ignorance is not innocence. But reverence is a beautiful quality in woman.

"How long is this sort of thing to go on?" she said, unconsciously repeating Goring's words. "Why should your life be wrecked because of a scoundrel like that? There's no justice in the laws of England or you would have been able to send him to the right about long ago, and then you'd have been free to marry the man who loves you. My! way over in 'Merica we don't do things in that one-horse way. Here it seems, though he has broken every vow he ever made, because he has avoided cruelty, amounting to danger to life and limb, you're chained to him for life. It's a crying shame, I say, if it is the law; but—I can't think it is the law. Anyway, as you're tied by law, why don't you see if the law can untie you?"

Madeleine looked at her tearfully ; she did not speak.

“And,” went on Mimi, “if it can’t (and I believe it can), then the best thing you can do is to cut the knot yourself. It’s your own fault that it hasn’t been cut long ago. A good man loves you, and you love him. Why hesitate any longer? You are only spoiling his life and your own too. Oh! I know the difficulties. And then, of course, there is what the world will say. But what matter? I’ll stand by you, and I’m some—and Jack’ll stand by you too, and his mother and father and all your friends who are worth the name of friends. As for the rest, what do they matter?”

“It isn’t what the world will say,” said Madeleine in a low voice. “It is whether it is right in itself.”

“I suppose you mean whether it is lawful? If it isn’t lawful, then the law is unjust, and should be changed; it would be quite lawful in America, that’s all I know, and in half the countries of Europe too—I surmise.”

“I wasn’t thinking of the law of the land—that is little, but of the law of God—that is much.”

“You mean the law of the church, I suppose?” corrected Mimi. What may be called the sacramental nature of marriage had never even remotely appealed to her. Like many others who write and talk about marriage, she ignored altogether this factor in the problem. And yet as one which has to be reckoned with, perhaps it is the most powerful factor of all. “Which church? There are such a lot of them, and they none of them agree. All I can say, church or no church, there is no true marriage without love.”

“But marriage is a sacrament?”

“Where love is, but not where love is not. That’s so. Look at half the marriages nowadays, a mere matter of buying or selling. A young girl is wed to an old profligate, or a young man sells himself to an old woman, or two people enter into a matrimonial arrangement for their mutual convenience without a grain of love. Is there anything sacramental about a marriage like theirs? No, not though the Pope of Rome, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Greek Metropolitan, or all three of them together, stood over the couple to ratify the bargain.”



Mimi's high-pitched voice rose somewhat higher as she expounded her creed. There could be hardly a greater contrast than these two women, outwardly or inwardly. The one with her cheap black dress, and thin face, with its ever-present expression of patient sweetness; the other richly dressed, surrounded with all that wealth could give, radiant with health and animation. The one trained in the old-fashioned school of sober piety and purity, with the force of her early training and religious teaching strong upon her; the other educated in a very different school, some would say hardly educated at all, absolutely without the quality called reverence, free-thinking and unconventional. Yet between them was the most enduring link of all. Both were good and pure women.

Madeleine leant back wearily.

"What you say may be true," she said, "so far as it goes. But these things are not of the essence. One can but act according to one's lights."

"Then act in the light of love," said Mimi. "Madeleine, you know me too well to think that I would urge you to do what I thought wrong. It is because I believe it to be right, because I feel



that it is for your happiness that I urge it. And for his happiness too—he is trying to keep true to you. But it is not easy for him. You don't know what temptations there are for a man in his position, and a man is different to a woman. The women are all buzzing round him like flies round molasses. And Lady Bradford is in front of them all—I'm told there was something between them out in India—from what I hear, and see, there's a danger of its all being on again. That little Mrs. Massarene tells me they are always together."

There was a good deal of exaggeration here, some on Mimi's part, and much on Mrs. Massarene's, but the shaft sped home. Madeleine's face turned deadly white. A saint she might be; a woman she certainly was. Even a woman-saint cannot stand by and see the man she loves robbed from her by another woman. The love of woman will bear all things, hope all things, endure all things, but that. With a supreme effort she mastered herself, and rose from her seat.

"Good-bye, Mimi," she said, holding out her hand. "I think I will go now, if you please. I can never thank you enough—you know all that I

feel. And for the rest I thank you too. I believe you are a true friend—though you do not quite understand—I cannot say more now.”

Mimi embraced her with silent sympathy, and let her go. Her womanly intuition told her that it would not be wise to press her further.

It was dark, and the lamps were lighted, when Madeleine found herself outside. She got into a 'bus at Piccadilly Circus. (She had refused Mimi's offer of her brougham, and she had no money to spare for cabs.) It trundled her along as far as Bloomsbury, and put her down within a short walk of the street in which she lived. The night was fine and warm, as April nights are wont to be, yet she shivered as she hurried through the great ghostly Russell Square. The darkness seemed to close her round. The silence of the deserted square seemed the echo of her lonely life.

Since Mimi had spoken of Lady Bradford she had thought of nothing else—Kenneth and Lady Bradford. She thought of her, in the brilliancy of her beauty, with the full armoury of her Circean wiles; she thought of him, driven from herself, driven back upon himself, with the ashes of the old love

warming in his heart. The satyr voices were calling him. Could she wonder if he listened? Because she herself would not yield, could she doom him to a loveless life? Could she expect it of him? She must give him up altogether. But not to this woman—ah! not to her. The irony of the situation rose and mocked her. This sacrifice of her life's happiness by which she sought to raise him would be the cause of his degradation.

“My God!” she murmured, lifting her face to the silent stars, “it is my own doing—my own doing. And yet he might have waited a little while—a little while.”

## CHAPTER XLV.

LONDON in May has a charm which is all its own. The trees in the parks have donned their spring vesture, the rhododendrons are in full bloom, the chestnut trees are covered with creamy blossoms. The houses in Mayfair and Belgravia are as bright as window-boxes and coats of fresh paint can make them, the shop windows look their prettiest, the streets and squares are full of life and movement. A few weeks later, maybe, the parks will be parched and bare, the trees dusty and grimy, the streets stuffy and hot, the people bored and languid. But in May there are none of these things. The season is yet young; the joy of living is in the air.

And London is lovely by night in May. The gracious dusk softens the harsh outlines, and glorifies the houses of their square commonplace. The young May moon rises upon the purple of

the night, and the streets are transformed into long bands of white, the ugly blocks of buildings into palaces, the chimneys into campaniles. The rows of gas-lamps melt into lines of orange flame, the lights of the hansom's dart to and fro like fire-flies in the dusk, the ceaseless roar of the city sounds as the distant rolling of the sea, the surging of the waves in the great ocean of humanity.

The spirit of Hedonism is abroad; there is a sound of revelry by night.

There was a more than usual sound of revelry one Wednesday evening, towards the end of the month. Wednesday is the fullest night of the social week, and on this night it seemed fuller than ever. Awnings were out, and red carpets down, and lines of carriages were drawn up in many of the streets and squares. Perhaps the longest line of all was in front of Lord Lochsporrán's house in Mayfair. It was so long that it ran all down the street, and round the corner far up Park Lane.

Lady Lochsporrán was giving a party, one of those semi-social, semi-political gatherings which

include all sorts of men, and the usual sort of women. Lord Lochsporrان and Surat ("I always forget the Surat," said Lady Fitzpoodle) was one of those rare birds, a Radical peer, and rarer still, he was a statesman with a past and a future. He had been Governor of a Presidency in India, and now he held a minor office in the Government. People wondered why he accepted so small a post, but Lord Lochsporrان had made it a rule through life to take whatever came in his way, and throw it over when he got something better. And the something better would soon come, for in the councils of the Party he was spoken of as a man who was certain to draw trumps at the next shuffling of the Ministerial cards, and to be promoted to that charmed circle of peers, without whose presence no thoroughly Radical Cabinet is complete.

Both he and Lady Lochsporrان were determined that the time should be short.

An admitted authority has declared that since the secession of the Whigs, Liberal society has ceased to be,—a somewhat premature statement. Lady Lochsporrان was determined, at any rate, to do what in her lay to wipe away this reproach.

Herein she saw her opportunity. To revive the exclusively political salon of the early Victorian era was an impossibility, so she took for her ideal the cosmopolitan gatherings of the late Lady Waldegrave. She did not altogether succeed in attaining her ideal; she had not the same material to work with, for one thing, and she was not Lady Waldegrave, for another. But she managed admirably well, all things considered, and the Tadpoles and Tapers of the Party, with an eye on recalcitrant M.P.s, wagged their heads, and said confidentially that a salon like Lady Lochsporrان's was the thing wanted to keep the Party together.

It was midnight, but the stairs were still thronged. Lady Lochsporrان, tall and angular, cumbered with a bouquet, and wearing her far-famed diamonds, was still posted at the head of the staircase, greeting her guests with a somewhat weary handshake, and a stereotyped smile. Now and then she would flash a brighter look, or exchange a word of welcome as her eyes lighted on some stray intimate in the throng. Lord Lochsporrان was hovering near, a lank, long man, with stooping shoulders and side whiskers, conspicuous

by the blue riband of the G.C.S.I. athwart his breast. The Blue Hungarians were playing frantically amid a grove of palms, the air was heavy with the scent of flowers, and hot with many breaths, the rooms were crowded with a surging mob, the supper-room was in a state of siege. Decidedly it was a great success.

And the company was cosmopolitan as it was crowded. A very minor royalty was holding a mimic court in the last of the long suite of rooms. There were peers and peeresses galore, Radical peers many of them, and of these most were in office. There is not much point in being a Radical peer except to be in office. But the company were by no means exclusively Radical, for, by a not unusual paradox, the Lochsporrans' intimate friends nearly all belonged to the other persuasion. There was a Unionist duchess, for instance, who had helped to boycott a Home Rule Lord Lieutenant; there were judges and diplomats, members of parliament with their wives and daughters, men of letters, county councillors, fashionable doctors and preachers, socialists and solicitors, all rubbing shoulders. The mix-



ture was enough to make the patronesses of Almack's rise from the dead.

The India element was, of course, to the fore, as befitted an ex-governor. Rumour had it that Lord Lochsporrán would go to the India Office as soon as the worthy churchwarden, who, by a freak of irony, was then ruling our Eastern Empire from Downing Street, could be persuaded to resign. There was the young Maharajah of Kutchpawani, who was in a fair way of being ruined by a combination of European ideas and European ladies. There was our old friend Lady Fitzpoodle, in a turban and garnets, talking to the Bishop of Kolapul, who was Home just now to enjoy the delights of airing his apron in Piccadilly, and of being "my lorded" at Exeter Hall. There was Sir William Oldtrampe, that incarnation of red tape at the India Office, discoursing with Sir Curtsaje Damnthebhoy whom the misguided electors of Billingsgate had returned to represent their interests in parliament. And there was another Radical member of parliament, Abraham Abel, the anti-opium faddist, who once went to India on an autumn trip, and thenceforth posed as an authority on Indian affairs

in the House of Commons for ever. He was arguing fiercely about a certain other unsavoury fad with soldierly Dr. John Sanderson, the ex-viceroy's pet doctor, who was now revelling in fees and fashion in Harley Street.

Goring was here also; he had known Lady Lochsporrán in India; he had been at one time on the ex-Governor's Staff. He struggled through two of the rooms, exchanging greetings here and there. He had got into the third room, and was meditating a bolt, when some one tapped him with her fan.

"How d'ye do, Sir Kenneth?" exclaimed Mrs. Massarene, a radiant vision in satin, chiffon, and orchids. "What a bear garden, isn't it?"

"It is rather a crush," said Goring, after acknowledging her greeting, and nodding to Davenport, who, in a white waistcoat and abnormal buttonhole, was in close attendance. "In this room it's a bit easier, I think."

"Society is a most extraordinary thing when one comes to think of it," rattled on Mrs. Massarene vivaciously, detaining him by her side. "One half is always on the offensive, and the other half on the

defensive. I think the offensives predominate to-night."

Goring laughed.

"Well, at least one can endeavour to be in-offensive in an offensive age," he said.

"Ah!" broke in Lady Fitzpoodle, who with the Bishop of Kolapul was wedged in a corner close behind them, "society is very different now to what it was in my young days."

"The decay of religious belief, dear Lady Fitzpoodle, has much to do with it, believe me," said the bishop. "The old restraining influences are gone." He sighed. "We see the decadence of society everywhere, even in public worship."

"Not in the public worship of Mammon," said Mrs. Massarene flippantly; "there is no falling off there."

The bishop contemplated his buckles; he apparently did not hear.

"And what a lot of black men there are. Quite a mission-field positively. Who are they, Sir Kenneth? Are they all Indian princes? I never met a native in England yet who was not a prince or a rajah or something of the kind."

"I am afraid there are no Indian princes," laughed Goring, "unless it be the Maharajah of Kutchpawani, and he, you know, has become so European as almost to cease being Indian at all."

"They are of no caste at all, I assure you," said Lady Fitzpoodle, with the scorn of a nabob. "It is ridiculous that they should be here. But that was the mistake the Lochsporrans made in India—thrusting these low-caste natives on society. They had no discrimination. Don't you remember that scandal at Government House?" And she turned to the bishop.

The bishop was afraid that he did not remember.

"It was just after the Lochsporrans had come out," said Lady Fitzpoodle. "The Ilbert Bill was in the air, and they were full of that nonsense about consulting native opinion. Native fiddlesticks! They actually asked low-caste natives to dinner at Government House, and tried to force them down our throats. Everyone was most indignant, but what could we do? One night that pretty Mrs. Morgan was dining there—you remember her, Sir Kenneth?—and her husband. It was an

official dinner. The aide-de-camp came round and told her that Sir Jejiji Jarowji would take her in to dinner. She rose at once, ordered her carriage, and departed then and there. Jejiji had to go into dinner alone. Oh ! there was a great fuss about it, I assure you."

"I wonder she dared do it, and at Government House too! I thought officialdom was all powerful in India?" said Mrs. Massarene.

"Well, you see she was not the wife of an official; if she had been she would have had to bear it. She was the wife of a leading barrister, and could snap her fingers in the Governor's face. It taught the Lochsporrans a lesson; they had such levelling ideas," wound up Lady Fitzpoodle viciously.

"Well, they don't seem to have profited by it much. There are some queer, weird creatures here this evening," said Mrs. Massarene, elevating her lorgnette. "Ah!" she exclaimed suddenly, "there is Lady Bradford; how splendid she looks to-night."

Lady Bradford had just entered the room. She was standing a little apart from the crowd, chatting in animated conversation with Lord Lochsporrان.

Lord Kilkenny and some other men were trying to throw in a word now and then. The full blaze of the electric light fell upon her; she stood the test well. Her beauty was heightened by her dress. She wore a maize-coloured moiré, with point d'Alençon about the bodice, and diamonds and sapphires gleamed on the satiny whiteness of her neck and arms. She was one of the best-dressed and best-looking women in the room, and she knew it. She knew, too, that Goring was looking at her, and she caught the look of involuntary admiration in his eyes. But she did not appear to notice him. Presently, when Lord Lochsporrán had to tear himself away and devote himself to other guests, she moved slowly across the room to the group in the corner. The men to whom she had been talking considered themselves dismissed, except Lord Kilkenny.

"Yes, I am late," she said to Mrs. Massarene; "I have been dining at the Italian Embassy—it was rather an amusing dinner. Are you going on to the Evelines' ball, Moya? I hardly think it good enough. The number of things to-night is appalling."

"How is poor dear Sir John?" asked Lady Fitzpoodle, eyeing her with strong disapproval.

"Poor dear Sir John is very poorly," said Laline with amiable indifference; "he has gone down to Eastbourne for a few days."

She could afford to ignore Lady Fitzpoodle now, so she turned again to Mrs. Massarene.

"What were you laughing about just now?" she asked carelessly.

"The union of the peerage and the proletariat," replied Mrs. Massarene with a comprehensive wave of the fan.

Lord Kilkenny laughed.

"They call it guiding the onward march of the democracy," he said; "fancy they're on the box-seat when really they're being dragged at the cart-tail. It's all a delusion, don't you know!"

"Is it a delusion?" asked Laline; "I doubt it. To my mind a Radical peer is the deluder, not the deluded. He talks like a Radical, but he thinks like a peer."

"Ah," said Mrs. Massarene, "that fits in with my view of the New Liberalism; it is simply



a new way of being liberal with other people's money."

The bishop shook his head, but regarded Mrs. Massarene with a benignant smile.

"I am afraid," he said blandly, "that modern politics are simply a game for professional politicians."

"And a professional politician," said Mrs. Massarene, "is one who prates about the people and plots for himself."

"Well, one can hardly blame the poor things," said Lady Bradford; "they must live, don't you know?"

"I think one can hardly call a man like Lord Lochsporrán a professional politician," struck in Lady Fitzpoodle grimly. She was beginning to feel rather out of it. "He is the head of the clan M'Fie."

"One is hardly likely to forget it," chuckled Lord Kilkenny. "Don't you remember Davenport when he turned up at a durbar in a kilt? The natives took him for a ballerina."

"He should have been sketched in it," said Laline, laughing; "the impression was too good to have been lost. I must persuade him to sit to one



of those 'new English' artists—a smudge for the kilt, a line for Lochsporrán, and the rest for the imagination, don't you know?"

"How suggestive," said Lord Kilkenny. "But I think it would be all newness and no art."

"Like the new morality," said the bishop with a deprecating smile, "which is no morality at all."

"And unlike the new Hedonism," said Mrs. Massarene, "which is the only true morality."

Lady Fitzpoodle frowned, gathered up her train, and sailed away majestically on the arm of the bishop.

"I'm afraid we have shocked Lady Fitzpoodle," said Laline with mock concern, "she is so very Puritanical."

Mrs. Massarene gave her a swift glance.

"I love to shock Puritans," she said decidedly; "they are always either prurient or pragmatical. But you are mistaken, she's only gone to supper. She is great on suppers. She and the bishop will sit down for an hour and lament the decay of manners over a square meal, regardless that they are keeping a host of people waiting. If they can sit down, that is. I hope they have some tables in

the supper-room. I hate eating my food at a buffet with a hungry herd charging behind. It is bad for digestion, and ruinous to one's gown. I think I shall follow her example. Lord Kilkenny, come and storm the supper-room with me."

She laid her hand on his arm, and Lord Kilkenny had perforce to go, not without a backward glance. Davenport had disappeared. Laline and Goring were left alone. The crowd had thinned a little; people were already going. But it was too crowded for Laline.

"Shall we find a place where we can sit down?" she said. "I am tired of standing, and it is so noisy here."

They had not much difficulty in finding such a place. At the end of the room there was a conservatory built out over the portico, carpeted with red cloth and decorated with ivy and plants. It was tenanted by only two people, and they moved away as the others came in.

Laline gave a little sigh of satisfaction, and sank down on a seat, motioning Goring to a place beside her.

"Ah! this is better," she said, and waved the

pale yellow plumes of her fan with indolent grace.

The Blue Hungarians were playing some wailing minor melody, which hardly harmonised with the lively babel of conversation in the rooms beyond. But here the discord was softened and subdued by the distance. Laline leaned back in her seat. The trailing creepers made a background of dark green, and threw out her rich dress, her glimmering jewels, her seductive beauty. Her lips were slightly parted, her eyes glowed. Goring looked at her with admiration. He had frequently met her since that afternoon at the New Gallery,—for they had many acquaintances in common,—but always in a crowd. He had not been alone with her before; he had rather avoided being so. Instinct told him that she was dangerous. But she was delightful too, all the more delightful because she was dangerous. She had the sweetness of stolen waters.

Laline looked at him with a blush which was a lie. Some thought of what was passing in his mind communicated itself to her.

“Of what are you thinking?” she asked softly.

The blood rushed to his face like a boy of fifteen.

"I was thinking," he said bluntly, "that you are very beautiful."

Laline shrugged her white shoulders.

"That is very baldly put," she said. "Don't you know that the truth should always be draped, it is so much more suggestive?" Then her tone changed. "Why is it," she asked, in a lower voice, looking before her at the crowd outside, and speaking to herself rather than to him. "Why is it that men always say these things to me? Do they think a woman is to be fed on bonbons? And that you should do so! Ah! that is hardest of all. It is not compliments I hunger for; I am surfeited of them; I loathe them—but honour—love."

The last word was almost inaudible, but Goring heard it. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, at least on his part. He felt a stab of vague remorse that he should have unintentionally wounded her. She was a woman, and evidently unhappy.

"Pardon me;" he began.

She interrupted him with a quick gesture.

"There is nothing to be sorry for," she said, with a winning smile. "It was I who forgot. It was a moment of weakness. I ought not to have said what I did. I should not have done so to anyone but you."

Goring was not conscious of any reason why she should take him into her confidence, but he was flattered all the same. Lady Bradford was beautiful, admired, and she showed him marked preference. These things count, even with a quondam lover.

"And now, tell me about yourself," Laline went on, with frank friendliness. "I have seen so little of you. What are your plans? Is it true that you have gone in for yachting? Will you be at Cowes?"

He shook his head.

"My plans are very few. I have given up making any. I drift. I am going away—for a long time."

"Going away!" she echoed blankly. "When? Where?"

He told her briefly. As soon as he could make

his arrangements he was going away for a lengthened tour. He hoped to leave England in a few weeks.

"It is my remedy for all ills," he said, smiling. "I was always a rover, you know."

She put her fan to hide her mouth for a minute, and thought. She felt checkmated. She loved this man as much as it was possible for her to love anyone. She had meant to gradually lure him back to her side. To this end she had curbed her passionate nature; it had behoved her to walk warily, and, besides, there was plenty of time. But now . . . . Always a creature of impulse, a sudden resolution flashed over her. With an effort she dropped her fan and answered him lightly. She was her brilliant, entertaining self again.

They sat there talking for some time, now and then dropping into those half-confidences which are so dangerous between a man and woman. Never had she been more alluring, more fascinating. Goring's vague distrust melted away, and something of the old glamour stole over him again. People passed and repassed outside. They did not notice them. The shifting crowd grew less and

less. One man looked at them and nodded to his companion with a meaning smile. They were thinking that Kilkenny's day was waning, and that the beautiful Lady Bradford had added another recruit to her train.

By-and-by a shadow fell across the entrance. It was Lord Kilkenny. He had shaken off Mrs. Massarene at last, and had been looking for Laline everywhere. He asked her if she were going on to the Evelines' ball. There was a ring in his voice which she resented.

"I have changed my mind," she said briefly, with a curt gesture of dismissal. "Sir Kenneth, will you see me to my carriage?"

## CHAPTER XLVI.

THEY had to wait a few minutes in the crowded hall. Within, there was a throng of departing guests; without, the slamming of carriage doors and the hoarse shouts of the lacqueys. Laline chatted to Goring while they were waiting. The white light of the lamps fell about her, on the rich folds of her cloak, and on the diamonds and sapphires in her hair. Her eyes were bright, and the rose-leaf flush on her cheeks deepened. On her, at any rate, there was none of that weariness or silence which is so characteristic of a going-away crowd, but her vivacity was all for him. She barely acknowledged the greetings of one or two acquaintances; she seemed quite unconscious of the glances which were directed towards her.

“Lady Bradford’s carriage.”

She passed quickly down the carpeted steps, her hand leaned lightly on Goring’s arm, and she talked



to him as she went. She got into the carriage, leaving Goring standing on the pavement to wish her good-night.

The footman held open the carriage door.

"Jump in," she said in the middle of an unfinished sentence, leaning forward with a smile. "I'll tell you about it as we go along."

Goring hesitated. She swept aside her dress with an inviting gesture. The footman still held open the door, the horses half moved on. There was a row of impatient coachmen behind, a crowd of impatient people in the door-way. A shout went forth, "Lord Wallingford's carriage." Lady Bradford's carriage blocked the way. Goring sprang in. The footman shut the door and clambered on to the box.

It was the work of a moment. Before Goring had realized it they were off, and the carriage was bowling down Park Lane.

Laline seemed to take it very much as a matter of course. She went on with her story ; it had reference to some river-party which she and Mrs. Massarene were arranging for Sunday, and to which she wished Goring to come. In the perfumed dusk

of the carriage he could scarcely see her face, but as they were turning down Grosvenor Place the light of a lamp shone in for a moment, and gave a glimpse of her red lips and shining eyes. And once, as she was pulling the rug around her, her gloved hand touched his, and lingered.

They were in Eaton Square almost immediately ; the carriage drew up before the silent house. Over the other side of the square a party was going on, but the gardens intervened, and here all was quiet. The footman rang the bell, and let down the steps. The hall door opened, emitting a glare of light. Goring got out, and gave his hand to Laline. She let hers rest there a moment, and stood facing him in the moonlight. A little breeze blew across the gardens, and bore on its breath the scent of May-blossom and lilac. She shivered, and drew her cloak closer around her.

"Good-night," he said, standing bare-headed before her.

"Oh ! don't say good-night," she said lightly, moving towards the door as she spoke. "Come in and have a chat for a few minutes. The night is yet young."

He paused irresolutely.

"I am afraid," he began, "that—"

She interrupted him with an imperious little gesture.

"That I am tired. Oh, no! I am not an early bird, and I am all alone. Come. There is something I wish to say to you."

Her glance swept over him; a glance at once provocative, appealing, commanding. The impassive butler still held open the door. Goring couldn't keep her standing on the pavement. To refuse would be rude; to hesitate ridiculous. He always lacked social decision. Without another word he followed her into the house.

"Bring me some soup," she said to the servant, "to the boudoir—you understand."

She swept up the stairs to a room on the first floor.

"It is a great mistake to spare one's servants," she said, with a silvery laugh; "if one does, they only take advantage. I don't consider mine, and the result is they consider me. Some people send their servants to bed, and come home shivering to a darkened house and a half-awakened maid. I don't do those things. My servants exist for my

convenience. If they grumble, I pay them extra. If they grumble then I send them away. But they never do grumble then. Money soothes all their woes; it is the only influence to which they are amenable. I learnt that in India, and the genus servant is the same all over the world. People talk of sparing their servants; it generally means that they are too mean to pay them properly. Economy is generally a cloak for shabbiness. I hate economy, I don't understand it."

"I remember," he said reflectively. "That was so."

She looked at him for a moment curiously, and then went in.

It was a luxurious nest, this boudoir of Lady Bradford's, furnished in a style of subdued Oriental splendour, which was characteristic of the whole house. The dominant note of colour, if there could be said to be any dominant note in a warm harmony of many hues, was a dull gold. There were a great many draperies, and a great many cushions and lounges, a great many knick-knacks and photographs, chiefly of men (Lord Kilkenney conspicuous among them), and an all-pervading sense

of luxury and comfort. There was a portière of some rich Indian stuff across the door, glittering with beetles' wings and heavy with gold embroidery. Two or three superb tiger skins lay athwart the floor. A silver swinging cresset emitted a faint glimmer, and the rest of the subdued light came chiefly from a large standard lamp heavily shrouded with yellow silk and lace. There was an odour of sandal wood in the warm air, and the room was full of flowers—heavily-scented, sensuous flowers—tuberose, lilies, and lilac. A wood fire was burning in the grate.

"Sit down," she said gaily, pointing to a low chair beneath the lamp, "and make yourself comfortable. Ah! it is good to see a fire; the night is chilly."

She threw off her cloak, and kneeling down on the rug, poked the fire into a blaze. She held out her hands to the warm glow. The fire-light danced on the coils of her dark hair, and on her neck and bosom. The warmth lifted her filmy lace. The sapphires gleamed.

The servant came in at this juncture, bearing a tray which he placed on a little table hard by.

There were other things beside the soup—*paté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches, and biscuits, whisky, wine, and mineral waters, and a box of cigarettes. He brought these things without their having been ordered, as though he was quite accustomed to serving little suppers at two o'clock in the morning. It didn't strike Goring at the time, but he remembered it afterwards.

"Will you have some soup?" asked Laline, crossing over to the table when the man had withdrawn. "No? . . . . I am a great believer in soup in the small hours. I never think it worth while having supper at those crushes. The food is generally ordered in wholesale, and the champagne is gooseberry-and-brimstone. So I have something to fall back upon, you see. Pray, help yourself. I am sure you must be dying for something to drink. Have a cigarette. . . . Oh, I don't mind the smoke in the least; my room is used to it. I mean, that I indulge now and then—No," waving aside the proffered box with playful protest, "I don't think I will, just now. Moya Massarene is an inveterate smoker. She goes in for those horrid perfumed cigarettes, don't you

know? . . . . Now, confess, isn't this delightful? There's just a hint of impropriety about it. Moya says there should be always just a suspicion of impropriety about enjoyment, to give it a zest, like the suggestion of sin in a novel, or the shred of tarragon in a salad."

She laughed a low, musical laugh, and sank down on a low divan the other side of the fire. She sipped her soup from its dainty china cup with an Epicurean air of enjoyment. She revelled in the warmth and luxury with which she was surrounded. She looked like some beautiful Circe, laughing and prattling, basking in the warmth and colour. Goring felt his blood warm as he gazed. She was passing fair, of the fairness which makes men mad.

She finished her soup by-and-by, and lay back among the cushions with which the divan was heaped. A tall vase, filled with white lilac, made a background for her dark head.

"So you are going away," she said, with a little sigh, looking down, and pensively caressing with her tiny foot the head of the tiger skin (a present from Lord Kilkenney) which lay on the floor; "and



just as we are beginning to see something of one another too. It is very sad."

"Oh, well, he said reassuringly, "I shall be back again some day, no doubt. I am not going away for ever. People have a knack of turning up again in a most unexpected way. One goes away, changes one's environment, the old faces fade out of one's life—it is only in novels that the same people are with us always—then hey presto! some change, some turn of the social wheel, and there they are again. To-night, for instance. Half the people we used to know in India were there."

She leaned one arm on the cushions, and bent her head on her hand.

"Yes," she said musingly, "people turn up again; but how changed. Or perhaps it is oneself who is changed. Anyway, they seem different. The only things certain in life are its mistakes."

She looked at him as she spoke. It was the look of a woman yearning for sympathy, yet too proud to crave for it in words.

"There is always the future," he said sympathetically; "mistakes lie in the past; let the past bury itself; we must live for the future."



She plucked a spray of lilac from the vase beside her, and looked at it a moment. Then her hand closed over the waxen petals, crushing them.

"Men have futures, women have pasts," she said bitterly. "There is no future for me. My future is one long regret, my past one great mistake. Ah, God!" she cried, and she threw aside the bruised flowers, "by what justice is it that for the mistake of a moment one is often doomed to a lifetime of suffering?"

She looked at him appealingly, her eyes full of the softness of unshed tears.

"I was a young girl then," she continued, more to herself than to him; "I did not know what marriage meant. Now I know—and suffer. A wife with her *caprices de coeur*, a husband with his *petits pieds-à-terre*. That is marriage as I know it. What a ghastly mockery it is! And, God knows, in all the world I have not a friend to whom I can turn."

She covered her face with her hands, and waited. She had conveyed to him what she wished to convey, the convenient marital relations which existed between herself and her husband. The hint was

lost on him. But her beauty and distress moved him deeply. His innate chivalry, and possibly his innate sensuality, made him very pitiful. He threw his cigarette into the fire, and came across to her.

“Do not grieve so,” he said unsteadily. “It is hard on you—very hard ; but you are not friendless. I will be your friend—if you will let me.”

He had risen to the bait ; he offered her the everlasting lie, friendship between a warm-hearted young man and a warm-blooded young woman—the very thing which he had declared to Madeleine could never be. He laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder as he spoke.

She looked up, the dark beauty of her face glowing ; the contact thrilled her, it thrilled him too. And in her eyes he read something more, something which made him pause. How hot the room was . . . . . how heavy the scent of the flowers . . . . . how still . . . . . how late. He looked towards the door.

She saw what was passing in his mind, that he wished to go, that she would lose him. In an instant she changed her tactics,

"That is very kind and good of you," she said, with a frank smile; "it is what I should have expected; you were always a true friend, Kenneth. I may call you Kenneth, may I not? as a pledge of our friendship. . . . And now, before you go, I want you to do something for me—I may not have the chance to ask you again. Oh!" noticing the slight change on his face, "it is but a little thing. Ah, Kenneth, I always thought you had Scotch blood in you, you are so canny. Will you bring me that book over there?" pointing to a table under the lamp. "Yes, the large one. I want you to write your name in it. It will be a sign and a seal of our friendship," she said, motioning him to sit down beside her. "You have written in it before," she continued softly, "but that was under the old dispensation. This is the new. Let us find a place."

She turned over the leaves absently as she spoke. It was one of those scrap-books which some women delight to keep, a medley of photographs of places, and of people, of queer, whimsical etchings, of autographs, scraps of verse, little clippings from newspapers, and so on; idle memories of idle moments,

a nondescript record of life with all the unpleasantness left out. It was a heavy book. He half supported it on his knees ; they bent over it together. His breath fanned her shoulder.

She turned over some of the later pages quickly. But in the earlier part of the book she lingered. There were glimpses of India, bits of Elysium and Dustypore. She laughed and talked to him with heightened colour, as she pointed out first one thing, then another, every now and then relapsing into reminiscence ; the aura of the past hung over all like a glamour, subtle as the fragrance of dead rose leaves. They were so near one another, he could almost hear her heart beat, he could see the rise and fall of the filmy laces at her breast ; her white, rounded arm was close to his lips.

She turned to a page—and lingered. It was a photograph of a man and a woman on horseback ; they had reined up just outside a clump of thick trees, in the foreground was a level plain ; the photograph had caught something of the glare of the Indian day.

She raised her humid eyes to his ; her lips were quivering.

“Do you remember, Kenneth,” she whispered, “the old well—the dear dead days—when we were all to one another? Do you remember?”

His face flushed; something rose in his throat; the perfume of her passion intoxicated him. He was but human after all.

“I remember,” he said.

There was an eloquent silence. The air seemed to palpitate; some occult force was drawing them together; she bent toward him, and leaned her lips on his.

For a brief minute, with her arms around him, with her white bosom beating against his breast, with her great eyes glowing into his, he forgot love, honour, duty, everything—save the tropical flower of womanhood which lay in his arms . . . . for a minute, only. And then out of the miasma of passion there arose before him the memory of a shabby room, of a pale, pure face, of tear-stained eyes lit up with love’s light, of a voice saying, “*I trust you, Kenneth—I trust you.*” Ah! that was love indeed. This was—

He put her from him gently, and stood up. His face was white and set, his hand was shaking.

"Laline," he said hoarsely, "this must not be. You cannot—I cannot."

She lay back among her cushions, her eyes slumbrous with passion. Her emotion had mastered her; she hardly realised what he was saying.

He looked at her a moment, and then turned to go. The action roused her. With a swift movement she intercepted him, and threw herself before the door—her arms athwart the glittering portière—and barred his exit.

"You shall not go," she panted. "You shall not. Kenneth, have you no pity? I have loved you all along. It is my love for you which has saved me. Do not leave me. Ah!—do not."

He averted his face. Shame for her—shame for himself kept him silent.

"You are going away," she pleaded, misunderstanding his silence; "away from England. Let me go too—let me be with you, hear your voice. My life has nothing but you—all else is nothing—nothing!"

She stood before him in all her beauty, the folds of her rich dress sweeping around her, her voice low and pleading.

He turned away that he might not see her. His chivalrous respect for woman made him feel humiliated and grieved. But the fumes of passion had died away; his brain was clear; her words awoke within him no responsive chord.

"You are excited—unstrung," he said gently. "Mine is the blame; I ought to have known. Let us forget this. In honour I cannot—my love is in another's keeping. What you ask is not mine to give."

"In another's keeping!" she echoed; and paused. Her face darkened. "Ah!" she cried with a mocking laugh; "I have been blind—blind! That woman—your mistress; it is there your boasted honour lies."

Then followed a scene over which it is best to draw a veil.

Woman of the world though she was, Lady Bradford lost control over herself. She had played for high stakes and lost. She threw up the cards. She poured forth a torrent of half-coherent sentences. Every word drove Goring further from her. He heard for the first time how the sacred relations which he wished to establish between himself and

the woman he loved would be viewed by a brutal world. He saw, too, now that the veneer had rubbed off, how low it is possible for a woman to sink who loses her self-respect. The glamour apart, he saw her as she was—with passions rampant, with every evil thought laid bare, yet loathing herself the while, craving for love, grand even in the depth of her abasement.

How he got away he never knêw, he only knew that he found himself outside at last.

The dawn was breaking over the silent square.



## CHAPTER XLVII.

MADELEINE was at Burwood again.

She and Mimi were sitting beneath the big cedars on the lawn trying to kill that most tiresome hour of a summer's day, the hour after lunch. Outside the shade, the glare and heat were great. The full blaze of the August sun beat down upon the square white house, on the smooth lawns, and the flaming flower-beds. The distant woods were steeped in blue haze; beneath the thick-leaved oaks in the park the deer were resting; everything was somnolent from the heat; it was one of those glorious August days on which it is enough to exist.

Their conversation had been desultory; it had finally dribbled away altogether. They had reached that stage of intimacy when to talk is unnecessary, unless there is something to talk about. Mimi was yawning over the morning's paper, which had just

arrived. Madeleine was leaning back in the wicker chair, her eyes closed; she was well content to do nothing.

Her thoughts wandered away from Burwood, and travelled back over the last three months. It was three months or more since she had seen the last of Wortley Dampier. She had given him the money, and he had lost no time in making good his escape. She had heard from him since his arrival in Argentina, and had forwarded to him the promised balance. She was not likely to hear from him again; at least not until he wanted more, and he had no longer the power to enforce his demands. He could not return; their parting had been final.

He had realised this the last night they met. When she gave him the money, he had been moved to some sense of shame. Doubtless the spirits he had been freely imbibing had something to do with his maudlin penitence.

"You are a good woman," he said huskily; "I've treated you badly; we shall never see one another again—say you forgive me—if only for our child's sake."

"I forgive you," she answered. "God help you to lead a better life."

The next day Madeleine took up her burden again, and essayed to go on as before. But she could not. The struggle between her love and her religion had been a terribly hard one from the first, and recent events had conspired to make it harder still. Since her interview with Mimi a new element had entered, which made the conflict more acute. When the first shock of Mimi's suggestion about Goring and Lady Bradford had died away, she resolutely strove to thrust the doubt from her. In a measure she succeeded, but the leaven of doubt lingered almost unconsciously, and worked upon her thoughts. It at least did one thing. It revealed to her her heart. It showed her that while she thought she had been resisting she had really been yielding. Instead of striving to cast her love from her, she had taken it to her heart, fostered it, hugged it, brooded over it, to the exclusion of everything else. When she deemed herself strongest, she had been weakest. Now she saw the impossibility of standing any longer at the parting of the ways. She could not reasonably expect the man she loved to

remain always faithful to a sentiment, or to sacrifice himself on the altar of celibacy for her sake. If she would not yield, she must give him up altogether, and strive to forget him in thought, word and deed.

It was then that the last supreme conflict came. At first Madeleine felt that she must yield, that she could not, cost her what it may, see the man she loved drift from her to another woman. And when a woman who loves thinks thus, she is a long way on the road to yielding. She went over in her mind the points for and against, if she were to do as her friends wished, as Kenneth wished, and sue for a divorce. Her husband's infidelities in India were well known; but at this distance of time it would be difficult to prove them. There was the fact that he had connived at her dishonour; but how could she substantiate that? There was no physical cruelty; and to his desertion she had been a consenting party; in fact, she had insisted upon a separation. All these things, she had rightly said, would tell against a divorce. But of late the situation had developed. There was the intrigue with the Frenchwoman. There was the fact that

he had fled the country. The only thing certain about the law is its glorious uncertainty ; but the sum of her reflections was, that if she consented to institute a suit, there was a decided probability of her getting a divorce, the lack of proof of actual physical cruelty notwithstanding. The divorce court is apt to give a liberal interpretation to the term, cruelty. And when the decree was made absolute she would be free to marry the man she loved.

The temptation was strong upon her. She thought of Kenneth. The word "come" trembled on her lips ; but it was not uttered. Even as she hesitated, her scruples came back with redoubled force. She thrust the thought of a divorce from her with a shudder. Quite apart from the religious aspect of the case, how could she drag the pitiful story of her wedded misery through the mire of publicity, how lay bare all that she held sacred—all the strange, delicate world of feeling of passion, of imagination—before the coarse glare of the public courts ? All that was most womanly in her revolted at the idea. She would rather die.

And even if she were to brave the odium and

scandal of being a successful litigant in a matrimonial suit, what would she gain? Freedom from her husband. But for all practical purposes she had that already. It was impossible that he could molest her again. He had gone out of her life never to return. Freedom to marry again! That would be the real object of the suit; and it was here that the voice of conscience made itself heard. It was not a question with her of what was the law of the land, but of what was the law of God. While her divorced husband lived, could she, in God's sight, become the wife of the man she loved? If she did so, would she not be living in a state of legalised adultery? These were the questions which vexed her soul. It is hard, perhaps, for the new spirit, which scoffs at old faiths, and chafes against old restraints, to understand, much less to sympathise with, the nature of this woman's spiritual conflict. And yet it was a very real one. To her, her religion was a vital thing, a part of her very being. It had been the force which had shaped all her actions, it had been the ruling principle of her life. Though at times it had failed to satisfy her, though at times she had



wavered in her allegiance, though at times she had rebelled—for she was but human—yet at this crisis the force of her early training rushed back upon her, and on a vital point like this she turned instinctively to her religion, and sought therein for guidance.

She knew that the English Church in theory and in practice disapproves and discourages the remarriage of divorced persons, and though in practice some of her clergy tolerate the marriage of the innocent party in a divorce for adultery, yet even that concession, from the point of view of the school of thought in which she had been trained, is a breach of God's law. Still, if the point were a moot one, there must be some authority in its favour. In vain she turned to those sources where she had been wont to look for guidance; they all pointed one way, and that was not the way she wished to go. She turned to her Bible. Nothing could be more definite than the apostolic words: "*The woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth. . . . So that if while her husband liveth she be married to another man she shall be called an adulteress.*" She turned to the familiar marriage service; there

she found it plainly stated that death is the only dissolver of the matrimonial bond. There was no getting over the tremendous words: "*Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.*"

But, notwithstanding, she made one last effort. Her heart cried aloud one thing, her conscience whispered another. She fell back upon the thought natural to those who are placed in such a position, that though this might be right in a general sense, her case was an altogether exceptional one, a crueller case than most. There had been instances when even Rome had seen fit to exercise a dispensing power and dissolve a union. Surely if the exercise of the Church's dispensing power could ever be justified, it would be so in such a case as hers. So she did what was a very natural thing for a woman of her type to do. She went, as her prayer-book directed, to a "discreet and learned Minister of God's Word," and opened her grief.

The clergyman to whom she went was the vicar of St. Athanasius, the church near her Bloomsbury lodging. He was a good man according to his lights, a man who literally practised what he preached, a man who was content to spend and be



spent in doing his Master's work, one who counted all else as dross. If his views were narrow, they had all the thoroughness born of that narrowness. He was cultured, earnest, and pious, but he was a celibate priest, and to him the whole gamut of passion was an unknown thing. He listened to Madeleine's story with gentle pity (probably he had heard somewhat similar ones before); he encouraged her to speak frankly, and to tell him all.

When she had finished, he went over the ground with her, patiently, inch by inch. But he could hold out to her no hope of release, and he counselled her as sympathetically as he knew, and urged her as strongly as he could, to put away the thought of divorce as a thing unholy. His convictions on this point were strong ones. The relief she sought she possessed already, in what was practically a judicial separation, *a thoro et mensa*. She might have it legally ratified if she wished. That much the Church allowed, no more. Her law declared marriage to be indissoluble, and the sentence of divorce *a vinculo matrimonii* had never been pronounced by her courts. It did not seem to strike this bloodless, blameless priest that the ecclesiastical

expedient of compulsory celibacy might be cruel and unnatural, and especially so in a case like hers. In his view the liberty she sought was liberty to sin. He pointed out to her that divorce was a matter on which the law of the land and the law of the Church were in direct conflict. He regarded the divorce court with all the dislike of his school as an infringement on the spirituality of the realm, as a standing danger to morality, as a canker eating into the very heart of social life. To him increased facilities of divorce meant increased facilities of licentiousness. The "sacred indissolubility of holy matrimony," he declared, must be guarded at all costs, for upon it depended the social fabric of the home, the family, and the nation.

He then proceeded to pronounce on the particular case before him, namely, the remarriage of an innocent woman in a divorce for adultery (of course the re-marriage of guilty persons was absolutely forbidden). The law of the Church, he said, (it was impossible to get him away from that aspect,) based on the words of Christ, stood thus: A man might put away his wife if guilty of adultery, and his marriage with another woman might possibly be

tolerated (though not approved, nay, strongly discouraged) while the sinful woman lived. But an innocent woman was nowhere permitted to put away her guilty husband and marry another man during his lifetime. If she did this thing, notwithstanding that she had the sanction of the divorce court and the approval of the world, in the sight of God she would be an adulteress.

He supported his views by appeals to Scripture and to the custom of the universal Church, by reference to the decrees of the Council of Arles, by appeal to Canon 107 of the Anglican Church, by copious quotations from authorities, ancient and modern, from the early Fathers down to Mr. Gladstone and Archbishop Maclagan.

Poor Madeleine's feeble hope was utterly crushed by this weight of Scriptural patristic and ecclesiastical lore. Her last loop-hole of escape was closed. That there might be another aspect to this question, even from the ecclesiastical point of view, did not strike her; the priest's judgment, hard though it was, coincided with her own convictions, and with the doctrines she had been taught. She bowed her head in despair. Then seeing that she submitted

to his decree, her director's admonition took another note. He spoke to her with all the zeal of an enthusiast of the dignity of suffering, of the beauty of resignation, of the glory of witnessing for the Faith in a corrupt age. But just now these things came to her like stones to one who craved for bread. Her way was plain, her doubts were stilled, her convictions confirmed, her resolutions strengthened. But her hope was slain, her love torn, her heart broken.

When she got home she had it in her mind to write at once to Kenneth and tell him all. But she was so weary and spent with her long struggle that she lacked the will to make even this effort. Something had snapped within her. She grew weaker and weaker. May and June passed away, and July set in. Her physical strength waned more and more. Then Mimi Eveline swooped down upon her unexpectedly and carried her off to Burwood. Madeleine had no energy left to resist, or to do anything. She only wished to turn her face to the wall and pray for death. If life were henceforth to be like this, wherefore should she live it?

But when one is young and blessed with a good

constitution, death does not come for the praying. The change of air and scene, the watchfulness and care, soon pulled her round again, and here she was.

Mimi threw down her paper and looked at her companion thoughtfully. It was more than a month since Madeleine had come to Burwood, but not once, since the evening at Carlton Gardens, had Mimi mentioned to her Goring's name. She had deemed it best to wait, and leave things to take their course. But to-day the temptation was strong upon her to break the silence. She was wondering how to begin.

"I had a letter from Jack by the second post," she said abruptly.

Madeleine opened her eyes.

"Yes? Is he still at Cowes?"

"He is coming home to-morrow. He says the Lochsporrans are there on their yacht—and Lady Bradford. Lord Kilkenny is there too, in close attendance. Jack says people are talking a good deal about them. He is always with her now—more than ever. . . . Madeleine, I do not believe there was anything between her and Kenneth

Goring last season. They never see one another now."

"I did not believe it either," she said quietly ;  
"at least, not when I came to think."

Mimi gave her a swift glance, but Madeleine's face gave no sign. She was looking straight before her ; her eyes were fixed on a distant bed of brilliant begonias. It was not an encouraging opening, but Mimi made the best of it, and plunged boldly.

"He is going away next week for a long time—surely you will not let him go without a word ?"

Madeleine did not pretend to misunderstand her meaning. But she did not answer. She looked thoughtfully down at the turf at her feet.

"You will see him before he goes ; you will send him word," urged Mimi.

"There is no need to send ; he will come," she said. "I was going to tell you. He has written to ask me if I will see him. He may be here to-day."

"To-day !" echoed Mimi in surprise. "When did you hear ? At what time is he coming ? When he comes, what will you decide ?"

Madeleine looked up swiftly. Their eyes met. Hers were unwavering.

"I will do what is right—what is best for us both," she said.

Mimi looked perplexed at this somewhat oracular utterance. Then she sprang up from her chair and took Madeleine's hands in hers.

"Yes; do what is right," she said. "Be true to yourself and to him. I will stand by you whatever you do—only— Dear me," she broke off with an accent of intense irritation, "what on earth do these people want here at this time of day?"



## CHAPTER XLVIII.

MR. and Mrs. Jordan, superciliously preceded by one of the gorgeous footmen, came out of the house as Mimi spoke, and loomed large upon the terrace. Mimi looked round for a means of escape; but it was too late. Her visitors bore down upon her like two ships in full sail, and greeted her with the utmost effusion. They were both exceedingly hot, and Mrs. Jordan was, if anything, a trifle untidier than usual. Her bonnet was pushed far back on her head, and the tail of her dress had trailed in the dust all the way from the rectory.

“We caught sight of you from the drawing-room windows, so we thought we would follow the servant out,” explained the rector. “Ah! is that Mrs. Dampier? How do you do?”

He patronisingly extended a moist, warm hand. Mrs. Jordan, not so condescending contented her-



self with an inclination of her head. But hauteur was not Mrs. Jordan's strong point, and Mrs. Dampier's evident indifference somewhat nonplussed her.

"It is very hot," she said limply, subsiding into a chair.

The rector shot her a displeased glance.

"The seasons are not in our hands, Maria," he rebuked loftily.

"Well, really," said Mimi, with a comical glance from one to the other (Madeleine had walked away), "I surmise you didn't trail up here this broiling afternoon to spar about the weather."

"You are right, madam," said the rector pompously; "that was not the object of our mission."

He seated himself, wiped his heated brow, and proceeded to explain what that object was. Mrs. Jordan listened, throwing in a word now and then. They wanted to get one of their sons into a school attached to a well-known charity, and the Evelines, it appeared, had a considerable number of votes. Mimi promised her votes at once, and as many more as she could get. The wistful look in Mrs. Jordan's eyes, and the break in her querulous

voice, did far more than all the rector's platitudes.

"You make your mind easy," she said to Mrs. Jordan; "I'll fix that for you sure enough. Consider the thing done. When I say a thing I mean it. That's so."

Mrs. Jordan was affected almost to tears. Narrow-minded, vulgar, illiterate she might be, but she had a saving virtue which eclipsed all her faults—she was a good mother.

"I'm sure we're very much obliged to you," she whimpered; "it's such a comfort to get Reuben's schooling settled. I don't know how we should have managed it otherwise. 'Tis a large family to bring up and get out in the world."

"Too large for any woman to do her duty by," said Mimi decisively. "It's cruel."

The rector coughed and shuffled his large feet.

Mimi ignored him, and began to talk to Mrs. Jordan, much to that good lady's confusion, as she was quite unused to being singled out for special attention when her husband was with her. The rector regarded Mimi's back with undisguised astonishment. He cleared his throat with a vehemence

which made Mrs. Jordan jump in her chair. It had no effect upon Mimi; she appeared to have become unconscious of his presence. But the Reverend Septimus was not easily rebuffed.

"I see that you have that poor woman, Mrs. Dampier, staying with you," he broke in presently, in a tone of lofty pity. "It is most good of you. It is not everyone who would be so kind under the circumstances."

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Jordan, taking up the cue. "I really wonder at her caring to come to Burwood again after all that disgrace and scandal—and all the rest."

She sniffed spitefully.

"What disgrace?" asked Mimi bluntly.

"Oh! do you not know? It was here that her husband turned up, and under such disreputable circumstances—a disgraceful affair—and her husband tried—"

"The man who was her husband, you mean," corrected Mimi quietly. "I do not see how she could help what he did."

"Is he dead then?" exclaimed the rector with a sudden change of tone. "Oh, that is quite another

matter. I am gl—I mean we are all in the hands of Providence.”

“She was always very nice,” gushed Mrs. Jordan. “I can quite understand Sir Kenneth being smitten with her. I suppose he will marry her now, straight away.”

“All things work together for good. It is the Hand,” said the rector solemnly. He pursed up his lips and wagged his head portentously.

Mrs. Jordan heaved a conventional sigh.

“He is dead to her,” said Mimi. “They parted years ago in India in consequence of his cruelty and misconduct; their meeting here was a mere accident. You know all about that. Now he has left the country. She will never see him again.”

“Then he isn’t dead at all!” exclaimed Mrs. Jordan, her face falling.

“Oh—er—I didn’t quite understand,” said the rector blankly. “Maria, how could you be so premature? A judicial separation, I presume?” he said inquisitively. “Sad, very sad, but sometimes unavoidable. Poor woman! but she must kiss the Rod.”

“You’re to presume nothing of the kind,” said

Mimi ; "you're a bit too previous anyway. I hope she'll find some better way of shaking off her fetters than that. Why, in America she'd have got a divorce ten times over if she had wanted one."

"Ah ! I fear the nuptial tie is sadly lax in the United States," sighed the rector, "and the moral code consequently lax also."

"Not half as lax as it is here," cried Mimi, the light of battle dawning in her eyes. "Only we call things by their right names ; our morality is not merely a matter of convention. If a marriage turns out unhappily, we break the bond, and set the contracting parties free. At least way down West."

"Good gracious ! Whatever becomes of the children ?" exclaimed Mrs. Jordan, unconsciously putting a poser.

"Such a plan must mean the triumph of unruly wills and sinful affections, both of which matrimony was ordained to check," rebuked the rector, glancing apprehensively at his Maria. "And, moreover, marriage is a divine institution ; we must always remember that."

"Where love is, where fidelity is. Yes," said

Mimi, characteristically seizing the occasion to propound her views ; "but where there is neither love nor fidelity it is the reverse of divine. An unhappy marriage is a hell on earth. There's only one remedy, and that is to end it. When either party breaks his or her vows, the marriage contract should be void like other contracts. It is void by right, if not by law."

Mrs. Jordan sat upright and looked at Mimi as though she were a species of newly-discovered vermin. The rector coughed wrathfully and thrust his thick fingers through his short red hair. Then he remembered that his hostess was an American, and that she was rich, and he gave a soft answer.

"I cannot admit so dangerous a doctrine," he said in his best pulpit manner. "It is worse than the Romish error of marriage being a sacrament. Our Protestant and Reformed church strives for the *via media*."

"Oh ! as for that," said Mimi, with a shrug of the shoulder, "it's the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee. Reformed or unreformed don't make much difference on that point so far as I can

see. The church has always trampled on the rights of woman, always sanctioned the slavery of wives to their husbands. But we won't stand it much longer. The worms are turning at last."

"Well I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Jordan, with a shudder.

The Reverend Septimus shook his head.

"This comes," he said, "of woman forsaking her proper sphere and meddling with things which are too high for her. The floodgates are loosed indeed. Dear madam," he continued, "America is a land of strange views; but, ahem!—these are doubtful disputations. More than that, they are unscriptural. The husband is the head of the wife—her duty is to be subject to him in everything, as St. Paul says—"

"I don't care anything about St. Paul," broke in Mimi; "an old bachelor Jew. What could he know about it?"

"Really," exclaimed Mrs. Jordan, unable to contain herself any longer, "such sentiments I never heard. Shocking!"

"Silence, Maria," said the rector with a wave of his fat hand. "My dear lady," he continued with



elaborate irony, "I am unused to Transatlantic freedom of speech; but it is my duty to admonish you that this flippancy savours of the profane. Your objection is hardly serious. It is true that St. Paul preferred the single state. But St. Peter, who was a married man, also commanded wives to be in subjection to their husbands, and counselled the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, counsel which they sadly need at the present day, I fear."

"Why didn't he counsel the same ornament for the husbands, then?" said Mimi. "'That's where the sex-bias came in. No, I won't take the verdict of any man, saint or no saint, about women."

"Oh! shameful!" exclaimed Mrs. Jordan.

"Silence, Maria; we must bear with her. We may have misunderstood."

"I conclude you haven't," said Mimi drily.

"Then am I to understand that these are really your misguided opinions?" he asked, reddening angrily.

"You are; and not my opinions only, but those of thousands of women who are afraid to speak out. Subjection forsooth! We women have been in subjection long enough. Look at the thousands



of poor down-trodden wives, afraid to call their souls their own, mere chattels of their brutal, selfish husbands. Subjection! I call it slavery."

"Septimus, come away," said Mrs. Jordan, in a flutter.

"This is monstrous," said the Reverend Septimus, rising with as much dignity as he could command. "Such sentiments to me, the father of a family, the pastor of a parish! Your opinions are revolutionary, nay more, they are sinful. It is too much. May you be brought to a better frame of mind. Maria, let us disperse."

He picked up his hat, and departed in dudgeon, followed by his wife.

Mimi watched their retreating backs until they had turned the corner of the house; then she threw herself down in the chair and burst into a laugh. "I guess I made the fur fly that time," she said. "Well, it's time somebody told him the truth."

Then she thought of Madeleine, and her laughter died away. What would she decide? This outburst, grotesque though it was, showed her something of the solid force of opinion against which she had to contend in her efforts to create a new

heaven and a new earth. The strength of the existing social code lies in the fact that men and women have proved it by experience, while all alternative schemes are mere experiment. Was she right in advising Madeleine to do anything contrary to her convictions, or even contrary to the conventions? The thought struck her that between theory and practice there is a wide gulf fixed. Many might think as she thought, might perhaps speak much as she had spoken, but few would dare to act as she was always saying that they ought to act. It is one thing to shriek against the conventions; it is another thing to set them at open defiance. Mimi's face clouded over as she made her way back to the house.

"I will not fail her, come what may," she said to herself.

To her astonishment, at the bottom of the terrace steps she met Mrs. Jordan. She had furtively stolen back again.

"Oh, dear!" she said breathlessly, "I wanted to tell you—no, I'd better not. Why did you say such dreadful things and anger the rector so?" She hesitated, and then brushed away a tear with

the finger of her cotton glove. "Oh, please, Mrs. Eveline, you won't let our little tiff make any difference about Reuben—will you?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course not," said Mimi heartily. "That's a fixture. I'm not that sort anyway. I—"

"Maria,—Maria!" called a stentorian voice.

"There! I knew he'd be after me. God bless you—good-bye. Coming, Septimus—coming."

"What did you go back for?" her husband demanded gruffly, as they were trudging homeward down the hot, dusty road. I forbid you to enter the house again."

"I forgot my parasol," she answered humbly.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

THE clock in the grey church tower had chimed out six nearly an hour ago. The glory of the summer day was dying,—but slowly, reluctantly, as kisses die on lovers' lips. The blue of the sky took a deeper tint. The sun poured a golden lustre over the rolling woods and upon the trees of the shady nook in the park known as the rostrum. A few rays pierced the leafy canopy, and flickered down upon the woman who was sitting beneath.

The air was warm and still. Save for the drowsy hum of the insects outside in the sunshine, the occasional scampering of a rabbit through the undergrowth, the rustle of a bird's wing, no sound broke in upon the silence. Some freak of fancy had led Madeleine's steps here. In the warm stillness the world and its worries seemed far

away. She closed her eyes and gave herself up to reverie. . . . .

*The trees were garlanded with ivy ; there was a plateau of turf and terraced seats of turf. . . . . He came slowly towards her between the smooth boles of the beeches . . . . . nearer and nearer, his feet falling quietly on the moss-grown path. . . . . God in Heaven ! had the sea given up its dead ? . . . . .*

She opened her eyes with a little start. That was two years ago—two years of suffering and doubt, of self-torture and self-resistance ; but the struggle was over ; it could never be lived through again ; one can only die once. She could not remember it all. The past has a way of telescoping itself up and shrinking into darkness, but one or two lurid patches stand out, ineffaceable.

Her hands lay loosely in her lap. She sat there, on the trunk of a fallen tree, listening dreamily to the sounds of the warm woods. She was a little tired after her long ramble, and well content to rest. The leaves threw chequered shadows on the

turf. The amber light fell through the aisles of the beeches. The air was steeped in the scents of the summer evening. . . . .

Kenneth Goring came towards her between the smooth boles of the beeches . . . . . nearer and nearer, his feet falling quietly on the moss-grown path. . . . .

She did not rise up nor cry out ; but in her eyes there came a look of waiting ended. And over her there stole a curious sense of completeness which always came to her with the presence of the man she loved.

“ Madeleine.”

“ I have been waiting for you,” she said, “ and you have found me—here.”

“ Here !” he echoed, looking around, “ the place where our love-dream was shattered two years ago. We can piece it together again if you will.”

She did not answer, though her lips moved. Her eyes were fixed on the path between the beeches.

He sat down beside her, and, taking her hands in his, forced her to look at him. Still she said

nothing—and he waited. They sat there for some minutes, hand in hand. Both were wrestling with themselves.

“And so you are leaving England to-morrow,” she said at last, trying to speak steadily. “It is the best, the bravest thing to do. You wished to see me before you go.”

“Yes,” he repeated, “I wished to see you before I go.”

She looked at him inquiringly, half fearfully, and set her quivering lips.

“I wished to see you about many things. I wish to tell you, in the first place,” he said, speaking hurriedly, “that—that the man whom you—whom the law calls—your husband, will never trouble you again. He will have all he wants as long as he does not molest you. I have seen to that.”

She looked at him with shining eyes.

“That was nobly said, nobly done. How can I thank you?”

He turned away his head; a little flush crept over his face.



“By not thanking me at all, or rather, by suffering me to do one small thing for you.” He hesitated a moment, and then made the plunge. “Madeleine, you know what I had settled on you in the event of our marriage. Well, I have made it over to you. It is yours absolutely. If you refuse to take it, it will lie idle. But, if you care for me, at least let me have the happiness of doing this for you before I go away. I do not wish you to be hampered in any way by circumstances. I cannot see you want, I cannot—as a friend. Do not let your pride stand in the way.”

A mist came before her eyes. She did not answer immediately.

“Kenneth, dear,” she said presently, almost in a whisper, “it shall be as you wish. God forbid that my pride should keep those who love me from helping me—you least of all.”

She paused a moment, and then went on.

“The fact that I do this will show you that I trust you—your honour—wholly. Kenneth, I will be frank with you as a friend should be—”

He interrupted her quickly.

"But is that frank? It is your love I hunger for, not the dry husks of friendship. If we are to be frank, let us face that."

"My love, then," she said gently. "In the highest sense my love is yours, will always be yours while life lasts. You know what the past two years have been to me—to both of us. And since I saw you last the struggle has been keenest of all. The deep waters rushed over me, and for a time all was darkness. But out of the darkness the light has come. I have seen things as they are. I can palter with temptation no longer; it is playing with fire. My hesitation has been sin, my desires guilt. Kenneth, there must be an end to all this. That is why I said that I would see you to-day; because it is best you should learn the truth from my own lips. We must not meet again."

He shrank back as though he had received a blow.

"Madeleine," he protested, "let your heart speak—let your heart speak."

Her eyes met his, half-pitiful, half-despairing.

"Be true to yourself. Let your love speak," he pleaded.

"It is my love which speaks," she said, "at least all that is highest in it, and noblest and best."

He made a gesture of passionate dissent.

"We are living, breathing beings, not disembodied spirits. You know well enough that the love of which you speak can never satisfy us. The view you take is unnatural, exaggerated. It is the view of the nun, not of the woman. Surely we have suffered enough. Why sacrifice our real happiness to an unreal shadow? And that it is a mere shadow I can prove to you. Since I have seen you last I have made it my business to get counsel's opinion—the very highest—upon your case. The whole case has been submitted to one of the most eminent lawyers of the day. His opinion is that there are full and sufficient grounds for you to institute a divorce suit, and that you would be almost sure to get your freedom if you will take the necessary steps. Will you?"

With a sudden movement she covered her face with her hands.

“Now,” he urged, “do be reasonable. There is no longer any fear of betraying the fugitive. He is safe without the reach of the law—think of what you owe to yourself, to our love. You shall be spared unpleasantness as much as possible. We will take every step to lessen publicity—and money can do much. For the last time I ask you, will you let the suit go forward?”

She let her hands fall to her lap. For a moment they looked at one another in silence.

“For the last time?” she said. “No. I should be false to all the convictions of my life. I vowed myself for life by all that I hold most sacred; the bonds which bind me can only be loosed by death. And what a farce it would be. The law courts did not wed me; they cannot unwed me. These things are not Cæsar’s, but God’s.”

She had clasped her hands together; her face was pale, her lips quivering, but the light in her eyes shone clear and strong.

Yet he made another appeal.

"But, Madeleine," he urged, "consider; do not let this ecclesiastical phantom stand between us. The view you take is strained, unreasonable. Many good women have been driven to seek relief in the law courts. What duty or honour do you owe to this man? Surely you want your liberty?"

"I have my liberty," she said. "Our separation is complete. I do not seek the liberty to do wrong. I could not become another man's wife while he lives, at least not in sight of God. All the lawyers in the world cannot make that right. From my point of view marriage is the symbol of the mystic union between Christ and His Church. It is a holy estate."

"A holy estate!" he exclaimed impatiently. "You speak of the ideal. Surely you have not found it so?"

"I speak of the institution," she said. "Faults there may be, but they are the faults of individuals, not of the system. I speak of the ideal, yes. In these things we must have an ideal. We cannot

be without it. We dare not, for within us, and without us, the foes of purity are lurking, luring, goading us into sin. The laws of God were given us to resist temptation, not that we should break them the moment they clashed with our desires."

"Dear one," he said, "I love you too well to tempt you to sin. But this is not sin. Love is the sacrament. Where love is there is no sin, nor can ever be. Love is life; sin is death."

"Where hallowed love is. But love unblest by God, unconsecrated love, that is sin. All the divorce courts of the world will not make it otherwise. Such a life as you propose would be spiritual death to me. . . . Kenneth, dear," her voice broke, "you know what it costs me to say this—but I cannot—I cannot. A great principle lies behind. I cannot sacrifice it even to your love. Our case is hard, cruelly hard—but we are not alone—I am not alone. What of the untold agony of thousands of wives and mothers, who bear all things, hope all things, endure all things for their children's sake, and for the law of God? Their

case is worse than mine. Shall I be weak where they are strong? Shall I faint when they fail not? I must not—for the sake of our common womanhood.”

He gave an impatient sigh. His last hope, the hope which had brought him down here to-day, died away. It had not been a strong one, for he knew how firm her convictions were on this point. It was like beating himself against a rock.

“This, then, is your decision?” he said. “The key of your prison house is at your feet. You refuse to pick it up and go forth to freedom?”

“I shall never be free while he lives,” she said in a low voice; “not free to do as you wish.”

“And he will live,” he said. For the life of him he could not keep a ring of bitterness out of his voice. “His life is as good as yours or mine. Inconvenient husbands do not conveniently die off except in three-volume novels.”

She was silent; but her lips went white.

“And so this will go on,” he said, “year in and year out. You talk about finality; there is no



finality except death. I am going away. I shall not cease to love you while life lasts. You will not cease to love me. Sooner or later I shall come back again; I shall plead again. You will refuse to listen, and our lives will go on like two parallel lines which never meet."

Their eyes met. They might have served for studies in despair, these two, as they looked at one another across the gulf of their dead hopes. Then suddenly she burst into a passion of weeping.

"Oh, Kenneth!" she cried, "help me to bear it—help me to bear it!"

It was the woman in her which forced forth this cry. It touched him far more than anything else had done. His manhood came to the fore. He felt ashamed. She was a woman, and weak; her very weakness should be her strength. Her views might be exaggerated, superstitious, unnatural. His reason rose in revolt against them. But if she thought thus, why should he tempt her to be untrue to herself? Dimly he grasped something of the nature of her struggle. Clearly he saw the nobility

of character which made her resist every temptation to do what she conceived to be evil. He drew her to him, all unresisting now, and soothed her with fond endearments, and whispered words of love.

The sunlight faded, the shadows deepened, a filmy mist, the mist of evening, ethereal in its essence, crept up, and hung like a veil about the woods. A bell clanged across the park.

That roused her. She drew herself away from him with a little shuddering sigh. Her sobs had spent themselves. She lifted up her face to his, weary, pitiful, tear-stained.

He interpreted the mute appeal, and rose to go.

For a moment he stood, looking down upon her.

"Forgive me, dear one," he said gently. "I will help you all I can. Tell me how I can help you best."

"By doing as I wish," she said; "not only because I wish it, but because it is right. And, Kenneth, when you come back again, I want you

to show that my love has not wrecked your life. Believe me, there is some beauty in sacrifice, something nobler than the mere gratification of self. Let us try to live a little less for ourselves, a little more for others. Your life is full of possibilities; you have immense opportunities of doing good. Make use of them. Do not waste more time in vain regrets, but be worthy of yourself. I do not say forget me; that is impossible, if you love me as I love you. But try to think of me differently, and let my love lead you to higher things. The world is full of work for us if we will but do it. There is always pain to soothe and sorrow to solace. My work will be in that field in the future. I would fain wish, in a wider sense, that yours would lie there too. In this way we may, perhaps, catch some echo of the love we have lost. Human love has many phases; if we cannot have one, we may win the others. And there is a purer love too, a higher than any this earth can give—a love which glorifies even the meanest tasks if they be but done in its holy name.”

He bent down and kissed her hands.

“It shall be as you wish. I will try. We will both try. But we may fail; for we are weak, and our love is strong. And then—what will the end be?”

“God knows!” she said.

THE END.













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